

The Black Sun of Boredom: Henri Lefebvre and the Critique of Everyday Life

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how boredom can be understood in the context of Henri Lefebvre's (1901-1991) critique of everyday life. Through an integration of the boredom literature, both the fully developed studies as well as fragmentary passages, I argue that Lefebvre's critique of everyday life adds an important dimension to understanding boredom in modernity. One of the leading strands in boredom studies today argues that boredom is an historically specific experience unique to the rhythms of life imparted with the onset of modernity. Viewed in this light, boredom is a relatively recent phenomenon that can be linked to what Lefebvre calls the 'double process' of industrialization and urbanization. Although the mass profusion of boredom has left a seemingly indelible mark on society, it has received relatively little attention in both everyday life and academia. First coined in the middle of the 19th century, boredom is a relatively new word for what today is an all too pervasive experience. Writing throughout most of the 20th century, Lefebvre makes numerous references to boredom, yet, despite claiming that a study of boredom would be a significant contribution to his critique of everyday life, he never developed an in-depth and sustained analysis of this experience. Lefebvre did, however, identify an internal dialectic of mass culture as being an integral component for understanding boredom. It is argued that Lefebvre's theory of a dialectical process inherent to mass culture is a key for understanding boredom as an historically specific phenomenon. In organizing this dissertation, a constellation of themes are presented in order to articulate this dialectic. After exploring boredom's relationship to modernity, I then discuss what Lefebvre considers as the verso of modernity, everyday life. Following this, I consider the contradictions of space that give rise to boredom in urban centres and suburban peripheries by critically analyzing both the production of those spaces as well as how they are consumed in everyday life. Finally, I consider the escape from boredom offered in select sounds and images of the culture industry and its opposite, the embrace of boredom in certain 20th century avant-garde art movements. Through a reading of Lefebvre's critique of everyday life and complementary texts, this interdisciplinary dissertation is a contribution to understanding the mass phenomenon of boredom in modernity.

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List of Abbreviations for Henri Lefebvre's Work

* * * * *

CEL 1 – *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 1: Introduction*

CEL 2 – *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Foundations for a Sociology of Everyday Life*

CEL 3 – *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 3: From Modernity to Modernism
(Towards a Metaphilosophy of Daily Life)*

DM – *Dialectical Materialism*

EE – *The Everyday and Everydayness*

ELMW – *Everyday Life in the Modern World*

EX – *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval*

IM – *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959-May 1961*

INT – *Interview with Henri Lefebvre*

KW – *Key Writings*

LEF – *Lefebvre on the Situationists: an Interview*

ME – *Marxism Exploded*

PS – *The Production of Space*

RH – *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*

SC – *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*

SM – *The Sociology of Marx*

SSW – *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*

TLCP – *Towards a Leftist Cultural Politics:
Remarks Occasioned by the Centenary of Marx's Death*

UR – *The Urban Revolution*

WC – *Writings on Cities*

Introduction: Integrating a Riddle with a Puzzle

Who after all can honestly say that [she or] he has never experienced boredom?¹ – Reinhard Kuhn

Man on the earth is bored to death,
and this boredom is buried so deeply within him
that he no longer knows it.² – Antonin Artaud

It can't be helped: boredom is not simple.³ – Roland Barthes

* * * * *

Boredom is above all else a mysterious phenomenon. As early as 1929/30, Martin Heidegger set out to think through this difficult topic through a series of philosophical lectures. Here, Heidegger offered one of the best summaries of the difficulty in capturing the essence of boredom when he referred to it as a “riddle.”⁴ As Heidegger was well aware, boredom is not a standard riddle which can be glanced at and pondered over, or even passed on orally from one person to another; it is difficult to read. While boredom could be described as a philosophical riddle for Heidegger, to other scholars it will appear as a different type of riddle depending on their particular disciplinary or interdisciplinary background(s). As Linda L. Caldwell et al. argue, “the only apparent consensus is that boredom is a complex phenomenon.”⁵ The complexity of boredom is compounded by its fluidity. That is, if one wishes to describe one's own experience(s) of boredom, the moment one begins to think about it, the experience begins to dwindle or vanish entirely. Furthermore, the boredom experienced today could be different from that experienced

¹ Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 4.

² Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 459. I take the use of the term ‘man’ here as meaning ‘human’. I follow Henri Lefebvre who asks: “Human-beings – Why do we persist in saying ‘man’?” PS, 132. There are, however, many instances throughout his work where Lefebvre himself uses the term ‘man’ (homme).

³ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 25.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 89.

⁵ Linda L. Caldwell, Nancy Darling, Laura L. Payne, and Bonnie Dowdy, “Why are you Bored?": An Examination of Psychological and Social Control Causes of Boredom Among Adolescents,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 31(2), (1999): 103.

tomorrow. As such, one of the main methodological and theoretical difficulties in studying boredom is that it is an experience that effaces its own history.⁶ Perhaps, then, the biggest challenge with theorizing boredom is how to grasp the historical particularity of this particular mode of experience.⁷

One novel solution to pinning down boredom has been to map it out. In their fictional contribution to cartography titled *The Atlas of Experience*, Louise van Swaaij and Jean Klare sought to map out boredom alongside other common experiences. In the introduction to their book, the authors acknowledge the impossibility of cartographic perfection through a discussion of Jorge Luis Borges's famous story of a map that was so detailed and precise that it gradually became so big that it covered the entire Empire which it was constructed to represent.⁸ With this in mind, the authors set out to construct a map that substituted "the names of cities, rivers and seas for concepts, feelings and everyday experiences."⁹ The globe itself, then, is a representation, albeit incomplete, of all the experiences of life. Viewed as a globe, boredom can be found at the highest point,

⁶ Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 7. Akin to Goodstein, Ben Anderson notes how the study of boredom can be difficult as there is "the risk of losing hold of boredom by being interested." In "Time-Stilled Space-Slowed: How Boredom Matters," *Geoforum* 35 (2004): 752.

⁷ On this matter, Jean Baudrillard writes: "Boredom (*ennui*) is a subtle form of filterable virus, of fossilized tonality, which might be said to pass invisibly across the substance of time (*durée*), without altering it. Fine particles of boredom striate time like neutrinos, leaving no trace. There is scarcely any living memory of boredom. This is why it can superimpose itself on all kinds of activities, even exciting ones, since it lives in the interstices." *Fragments: Cool Memories III*, trans. Emily Agar (London: Verso Press, 2007), 50. It is worth mentioning that this series of diaries written by Baudrillard has been described by Steven Best and Douglas Kellner as works where "ennui is especially evident." *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991), 135.

⁸ *The Atlas of Experience*, 11. For the story itself, which is, somewhat ironically, less than a single page in length, see Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science," *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), 325.

⁹ Louise van Swaaij and Jean Klare, *The Atlas of Experience* (English text version) David Winner (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 5. This 'cartography' of boredom can be compared to Baudrillard's mention, albeit in passing, of an "oceanographer of *ennui*." *Cool Memories II: 1987-1990*, trans. Chris Turner (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 13. Whereas van Swaaij and Klare implicitly portray boredom as a concrete entity (represented by physical land), Baudrillard's suggestion is much more suitable for the purposes of this dissertation, as it emphasizes the fluidity of boredom. I am, therefore, not concerned with erecting rigid parameters for different forms of boredom.

the northernmost tip of a vast landmass of other experiences. Boredom, often thought of, when it is thought of at all, to be related to time, is here demonstrated, at least implicitly, to be related to space. As informative as this map is, it is nevertheless incomplete. Indeed, because of its static scale, a great deal of detail is absent, or, if it is present, it is sketched in a vague and imprecise way. What can be gleaned from the labels on the map are some of the standard themes with which boredom is associated, such as Sunday afternoons in the west, suburbia to the north, queues to the south, and routines to the east. At the level of a map such as this, boredom is relatively unremarkable, and there is no apparent reason for anyone to want to immerse themselves in it.

What is missing from this static depiction of boredom is historical specificity. It is difficult to discern how the landmass came to be this way and why it persists. Those details are not present because the map cannot depict the processes that have contributed to this. In order to unravel the riddle of boredom it is not only necessary to take a closer look, but it is also necessary to take several looks. One important detail on the map may elude a cursory glance, but is important for understanding the challenges involved in the study of boredom. On the right-hand side of the map, on the eastern shore, a lighthouse shines its beam away from the grounds of boredom and points the way to adventure, or, depending on one's perspective, warns those who may be approaching it against the dangers of its shores. Another perspective, one that informs this dissertation, takes the lighthouse as a welcome signal for the adventure that lay ahead in the mysterious land(s) of boredom.

Connecting boredom with adventure may seem odd at first glance,¹⁰ but it is a key methodological principle for Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) in his critique of everyday life. Whereas Lefebvre asks: “Why should the study of the banal itself be banal?,”¹¹ in the fifth and last installment of Jean Baudrillard’s *Cool Memories* diaries, Baudrillard (a former assistant to Lefebvre)¹² articulates the difficult task confronting any study of boredom by exclaiming that “boredom is out of luck; today it is being discussed in crushingly boring terms.”¹³ The timing of this comment is worth highlighting as it relates to any discussion(s) of boredom. This aphorism of Baudrillard’s was published in the original French in 2005, the same year two of the major studies of boredom were published in English. These are the translation of Lars Svendsen’s book *A Philosophy of Boredom* and Elizabeth Goodstein’s *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*.¹⁴ Was Baudrillard reacting to the publication of these texts? Was Baudrillard

¹⁰ On the seemingly incompatible nature of adventure and boredom, McKenzie Wark notes, “Adventure is nothing if not the practical refutation of boredom.” *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (London: Verso Press, 2011), 99.

¹¹ EE, 9. Additionally, Lefebvre argues the importance of studying the banal in a serious manner, as there is nothing self-evident about it: “To experience banality is not enough to tell us what banality actually is.” CEL 2, 259.

¹² Although the two thinkers were interested in many of the same topics, and the two clearly had a personal connection, a serious, lengthy study comparing Lefebvre’s work with Baudrillard’s has yet to be written. Douglas Kellner has noted that Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life “deeply influenced Baudrillard,” however, Baudrillard’s approach “differed significantly from his teacher.” *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 4. Mike Gane has contrasted Lefebvre and Baudrillard’s analyses of technology, but these reflections are relatively scant, leaving much to be desired. See Gane’s *Baudrillard’s Bestiary: Baudrillard and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 50-52. See also Baudrillard’s “Review of Henri Lefebvre’s *Taking a Position: Against the Technocrats*,” *The Uncollected Baudrillard*, 52-55.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories V*, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2006), 26. This statement can be contrasted with Leszek Kolakowski’s view on boredom: “I shall try not to be boring about boredom. In other words, I shall try to be brief. The problem of boredom is in itself neither boring nor trivial, for it concerns a sensation we have all experienced.” Leszek Kolakowski, “On Boredom,” *Freedom, Fame, Lying, and Betrayal*, trans. Agnieszka Kolakowski (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 85.

¹⁴ It is worth highlighting for the purpose of this dissertation that Lars Svendsen writes that he had “personally never been so bored as when I was in the process of completing a large dissertation after several years of work.” Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 35. Oddly enough, Svendsen begins his book by stating that “a long essay is the most suitable form for an investigation of [boredom], not a strictly analytical dissertation.” *Ibid.*, 8. Length is a

even aware of these entries into the study of boredom? If combined, the publication of these texts reveals a contradiction in boredom studies. By the midpoint of the first decade of the 21st century, the study of boredom was simultaneously exhausted and revitalized.

Along with the publication of two important studies of boredom, 2005 was also the year that the third and final volume of Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* was first published in English. Originally completed in 1981, Lefebvre's book is an ideal companion to Svendsen and Goodstein's respective boredom studies. In this particular text, Lefebvre discussed the marginalization of boredom in academia in addition to the equally enigmatic topic of everyday life. Lefebvre writes: "We are introducing into the theory of daily life what is generally regarded as a subjective judgement: vulgarity, *boredom*, malaise. The so-called social or human 'sciences' do not take account of such things. Thus, *boredom* does not exist for sociologists as a social fact. They are wrong!"¹⁵ Having worked in various sociology departments throughout his academic

key aspect where Svendsen's book departs from Goodstein, who wrote an incredibly detailed and hefty tome on boredom. My view on the matter of length clearly falls in line with Goodstein.

¹⁵ CEL 3, 74. (my italics). As a sociologist, Lefebvre was not alone in this sentiment. Putting a humourous slant on this blind spot in sociology, two contemporary sociologists have written that "sociology has largely ignored boredom, although producing a rather large amount of it." Donna K. Darden and Alan H. Marks, "Boredom: a Socially Disvalued Emotion," *Sociological Spectrum* 19 (1999): 33. Lefebvre clearly was not satisfied with the attention or lack thereof that supposed trivial subjects such as boredom received from the social sciences. Orrin E. Klapp, taking a somewhat more optimistic approach to the potential of the social sciences, mentions "social scientists have something to say about boredom." Klapp, *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 35. There are differing perspectives on whether there has, in fact, been anything akin to a sociology of boredom. On the one hand, it has been argued that "[a] sociology of boredom has yet to be written." J. Milton Yinger, *Countercultures: The Promise and Peril of a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 202. On the other hand, it has also been argued that "[t]here is a history as well as a sociology of boredom." Robert Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 27. One notable exception to Lefebvre's declaration of boredom not existing as a social fact for sociologists is Wolf Lepenies, a German sociologist, who wrote about boredom in the late 1960s. See Lepenies, "Spaces of Boredom and Melancholy," In *Melancholy and Society*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 87-130. For a critique of Lepenies' study of boredom, see Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 65-100.

career,¹⁶ Lefebvre was frustrated by the inattention paid to a phenomenon he believed to be a significant experience in everyday life.

While the social sciences have, indeed, largely neglected boredom, the discipline of psychology is one notable exception.¹⁷ Lefebvre's point is nevertheless well taken. It is interesting that boredom is generally not considered to be a serious area of study considering, as Fredric Jameson once claimed, boredom is the "disease of academics."¹⁸ Furthermore, while boredom may not be widely considered as an important object of inquiry, it has been said that the experience of boredom is inherent to the processes of academic scholarship, specifically the social sciences. Max Horkheimer argues that in the social sciences, "empirical research carries out its long, *boring*, individual studies that split up into a thousand partial questions, culminating in a chaos of countless enclaves of specialists."¹⁹ Along these lines, Zygmunt Bauman attributes the 20th century American psychologist Gordon Allport with having quipped that social scientists do not actually solve problems; they simply become bored by them.²⁰ Scholarly boredom may entail the shifting of one's research interests and/or research projects, but, at the same time, it carries with it the potential to lead one to other opportunities.

¹⁶ Lefebvre was a professor of sociology at the University of Strasbourg from 1961-65 and then the University of Paris – Nanterre from 1965-1973. Later in his career he would not accept sociologist as a label for himself.

¹⁷ The point has been made that "the field of psychology contains by far the largest body of research on boredom." Teresa Belton and Esther Priyadharshini. "Boredom and Schooling: a Cross-Disciplinary Exploration," *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 37(4), (December, 2007): 582. For one of the first and most influential psychological studies of boredom, see Otto Fenichel. "On the Psychology of Boredom," In *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel: First Series* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1953), 292-302. Not everyone believes psychology is an appropriate discipline for inquiring into the phenomenon of boredom. Martin Heidegger, for example, argues that "we cannot possibly treat boredom as an object of psychology." *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 283.

¹⁸ This comment arose during a conversation I had with Jameson on December 2nd, 2010 in his office at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

¹⁹ Max Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research," *Between Philosophy and Social Sciences: Selected Early Writings* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 9. My italics.

²⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), 93.

Interdisciplinarity

Nancy Anne Cluck wonders if interdisciplinarity is “merely a new game for *bored* scholars.”²¹ Perhaps the boredom of specialization leads one to adopt or delve into an integrative approach. I would like to give Cluck’s thought a further twist by turning her line around and argue that the study of boredom could be a new game for interdisciplinary scholars. It is no coincidence that several of the texts that have been published on boredom in the last decade acknowledge the importance of an interdisciplinary approach. Elizabeth Goodstein specifically describes her study of boredom as “interdisciplinary, because it integrates the seemingly incompatible results of previous studies, which have interpreted the experience from within particular hermeneutic horizons.”²² Similarly, Richard Winter describes his approach in his book *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment* as coming from “many angles.”²³ Lars Svendsen, too, utilizes an interdisciplinary approach, and offers an apt assessment of the complexity of boredom when he writes: “Since the phenomenon is so diverse, it calls for an interdisciplinary approach.”²⁴ The present situation of boredom studies, then, is one where interdisciplinarity is a popular, if not necessary, approach.

As for academia in general, it can be said that, unlike the social sciences, the humanities, especially literature and philosophy, have been much more receptive to taking boredom seriously. In the case of philosophy, Martin Heidegger’s aforementioned

²¹ Nancy Anne Cluck, “Reflections on the Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Humanities,” *Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the Literature*, ed. William H. Newell (New York: The College Board, 1998), 361. (my italics).

²² Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 13. She also goes on to mention that her approach is meta-disciplinary.

²³ Richard Winter, *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 9. This could also be interpreted as a multidisciplinary approach, though the author integrates them in an interdisciplinary fashion as opposed to analyzing them side-by-side.

²⁴ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 9.

lectures have set the standard. Fellow German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel has argued that “there is a kind of person for whom an enthusiasm for boredom represents the beginning of philosophy.”²⁵ Along these lines, in his ‘early writings’, Karl Marx argued that “[t]he *mystical* feeling which drives the philosopher from abstract thinking to intuition is *boredom*, the longing for a content.”²⁶ This longing for content, however, is not restricted to philosophers, but is one that is felt on a daily basis by countless individuals. This ‘longing for content’ is a definition for boredom that roughly approximates to Lefebvre’s usage of boredom as a concept, especially as it relates to his work on everyday life.

For Lefebvre, it is no coincidence that boredom has been excluded as a topic of inquiry from many disciplines, much the same as everyday life is largely neglected by academics. Lefebvre believes the omission of boredom from serious academic consideration to be the result of what he calls “intellectual terrorism.”²⁷ Though this may appear to be extreme in its condemnation of academic study, it is not without its merits.

He would elaborate this point as follows:

The bureaucracy still allows this terrorism to dominate. There are things that can be spoken of and things that cannot be spoken of. In the decade of the 1960s there were topics that were considered as matters of gravitas and those that were lacking gravitas. This spirit of gravity was, and still is, in many places the expression of a latent terrorism tied, moreover, to the sense of responsibility, to the respect of competence, incontestable qualities of the techno-bureaucracy. But it was impossible to be heard if one said, for example that the people were bored. Where? In Sweden, in the United States? Perhaps. Certainly not in France! The boredom of the people was not measurable, it did not have to be taken into consideration except as a journalistic theme or in humor. Repressive space could

²⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 24. Incidentally, Heidegger describes his lectures from 1929/1930 as “the beginning of an actual living philosophizing.” Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 57.

²⁶ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 398.

²⁷ SSW, 175.

also not be spoken of; that was not a “serious” topic; since space, possessing an objective character and being a scientific object, was neutral, politically...²⁸

It is important to note that Lefebvre speaks of boredom and space in rapid succession here. I will return to this thought later. For now, it is worth highlighting that while the current wave(s) of boredom studies can be dated back to the middle of the 1970s,²⁹ there have, nevertheless, been many who have contributed analyses of boredom in less obvious ways. Ironically, the 1960s, the very decade which Lefebvre condemns for not acknowledging the significance of boredom, produced some of the most penetrating analyses, including his own. These studies are largely focused on modernity and only consider boredom in fragmentary form. For example, the 1960s were the decade when the urban studies of Jane Jacobs were first published and recognized, the activist philosophizing of the Situationist International was most vibrant, and the art of Andy Warhol was gaining widespread acclaim. These diverse projects, along with many others, offer extraordinary insights into the phenomenon of boredom without explicitly labeling their projects as studies of boredom. The references to boredom are hidden in

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ There is somewhat of a publication trend for major boredom texts. They largely appear in publication in the middle of a decade at least in the English language. Prior to Svendsen and Goodstein, a decade earlier in 1995 two other monumental boredom texts were published: Patricia Meyer Spacks’s *Boredom: the Literary History of a State of Mind* and the English translation of Martin Heidegger’s lectures on boredom called *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. In the middle of the 1980s there were three important boredom studies: Orrin E. Klapp’s text *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society* was published in 1986, the same year as Richard Farmer and Norman D. Sunberg published their article on the ‘boredom proneness scale’. Two years earlier, Seán Desmond Healy published his book *Boredom, Self, and Culture*. In the 1970s there were, again, three important contributions on boredom. Reinhard Kuhn’s 1976 book, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature*, is often credited with initiating the current wave of boredom studies, but it is predated by two others. The 42nd issue of the journal *Social Research* put out in 1975 featured several essays on boredom and the collection of essays titled *Boredom: Root of Discontent and Aggression* edited by Franz R. Goetzl also published in 1975 is another key source. The essays in the Goetzl collection are based on papers given at a conference on boredom that took place in Berkeley, California two years earlier in 1973. There are, of course, exceptions to this pattern. See Michael Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999); Winter, *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani eds. *Essays on Boredom and Modernity* (New York: Rodopi, 2009); Peter Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

these texts, and it is only through looking closely at them can one see their value for understanding boredom.

The connections between boredom and Lefebvre's critique of everyday life are also buried in his texts. The content, then, is available, but requires a great deal of exploration. It may be surprising to some Lefebvre scholars that Lefebvre proposed a study of boredom not as a side project, but as a key component to his critique of everyday life. Both explicitly and implicitly, the theme of boredom looms large in Lefebvre's critique of everyday life. The threads, though incomplete, can be found scattered throughout his work, and the subject matter may not always be apparent. For example, in one text, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Lefebvre writes that "our sun is black and it spreads terror."³⁰ This short passage touches upon both Lefebvre's concept of a 'black sun', as well as the 'intellectual terrorism' surrounding it in academia. So far, boredom is absent. However, in another text, *Introduction to Modernity*, Lefebvre writes that "the threat of massive boredom hovers over us: exhausted themes, worn-out expressivity, universal pleonasm, spectacles which are monotonously 'private', etc."³¹ Boredom is present in this passage, and the mention of it hovering above could be an allusion to the black sun. Here, then, are two threads which may be related; it is only in another text where it becomes apparent that there are links between them. These two threads are brought together with a passage from the second volume of the *Critique* where Lefebvre claims that "on the horizon of the modern world dawns the black sun of boredom, and

³⁰ ELMW, 170.

³¹ IM, 231. This is not to say that boredom is the only modern experience, or the only one that is of concern to Lefebvre, but it is nevertheless a very important one. As Lefebvre puts it, "the sky of modernity has seen several stars in the ascendant: the sable sun of melancholy and ennui, disaster's pale moon, the red sun of joy." Ibid., 224.

critique of everyday life has a sociology of boredom as part of its agenda.”³² This is ultimately where Lefebvre emphasizes the importance of boredom for his work.

Sociology of Boredom

Despite the fact that Lefebvre explicitly states that boredom is an important part of his critique of everyday life, Lefebvre never followed through with his proposed sociology of boredom, or any other kind of study of boredom. However, around the same time of the second volume of his *Critique*, at the beginning of the 1960s, Lefebvre offered his most complete sketch of this project in his *Introduction to Modernity*. Here, Lefebvre discusses the interrelationship between modernity and boredom:

From this we can sketch out the main features of *a sociology of modern boredom*. It would draw attention to the ambiguity and internal dialectic of ‘mass culture’. This culture raises the average level of people’s culture; it helps to promote training, education, and above all, technicity. It is informative. It is interesting. *At the same time* it swamps people with information which is neutralized by its very quantity. It establishes a parallel between cultural and intellectual consumption and ‘private’ material consumption. It is voracious. It pillages culture’s accumulated wealth. It endlessly exploits old symbols, myths, forms and styles. It transfers the totality of history into discourse, and shatters discourse with visual images. It engineers a cultural retrogression into biology and brute nature (by way of sex or violent body language). Its ersatz provocations accelerate the wear and tear upon experience, and blight the world of expressivity.³³

Despite the richness of his proposed project, Lefebvre never explicitly followed through with his sociology of boredom, nor did he elaborate on the above obscure passage. The guiding thesis, however, is clear enough with Lefebvre’s emphasis on an ‘internal dialectic of mass culture’ as a key for understanding boredom in modernity. With this,

³² CEL 2, 75. This is the line I borrow from for the title of this dissertation. The only theorist to analyze Lefebvre’s nascent project in a sustained manner is Michael Gardiner. See, Michael E. Gardiner, “Henri Lefebvre and the ‘Sociology of Boredom’,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29(2), (2012): 37-62.

³³ IM, 231. A passage that is virtually identical to this one can be found in the following text: Henri Lefebvre, “Theses on Modernism,” In *Modernism and Modernity*, eds. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin (Halifax: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2004), 5-6.

there is a connection between the mass culture of modernity and the historical uniqueness of boredom as an experience. It would follow that, for Lefebvre, in order to contribute towards an understanding of boredom, it is important to examine some elements of modernity's mass culture broadly defined³⁴ to include the production and consumption of things in space as well as space itself, specifically the contradictions of space.

Focusing on space is where Lefebvre's work is similar to *The Atlas of Experience* mentioned near the beginning of this introduction, but it is also where he departs from many other contemporary thinkers who study boredom. For example, according to Martin Heidegger, boredom has "an almost obvious relation to time, a way in which we stand in respect to time, a feeling of time. Boredom and the question of boredom thus lead us to the problem of time."³⁵ Most would not disagree with the emphasis on time, but what about space? Lefebvre's work is a key for incorporating space with time in a discussion of boredom in modern everyday life.³⁶ As Helen Liggett puts it, "Lefebvre uses space to understand time and vice versa."³⁷ While Lefebvre emphasizes space, it is not at the exclusion of time. Lefebvre is clear on this point when he argues that "time

³⁴ It is important to note the uniqueness of Lefebvre's use of the term 'mass culture', as Lefebvre himself acknowledges the difficulty in effectively communicating one's message with such language, as "the term 'culture' gives rise to a good deal of confusion." PS, 230. For Lefebvre, the confusion is due to the fact that the "terms 'culture' and 'cultural' represent a jumbled mixture of art and science, ethics and esthetics, established 'values' and crumbling ideologies, fictitious ends and means that are effective or believed to be effective." EX, 142. Culture in general, then, is difficult to pinpoint. As for mass culture, Lefebvre argues that "mass culture is an aspect of the enigma of *modernity*." IM, 337. When Lefebvre refers to mass culture, he is not just talking about products, although those are important. His use of the term 'mass culture' is fairly broad and essentially applies to all of the products and by-products of capitalism imparted on the masses. For Lefebvre, this includes buildings, city streets, suburban houses, or, as he would put it, the contradictions of these spaces.

³⁵ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 80.

³⁶ According to Lefebvre himself, not privileging time over space is a point of difference he has with Heidegger. Despite Heidegger's explicit spatial examples, such as the peasant house of the Black Forest and the Greek temple, Lefebvre argues that "there can be no doubt about the main thrust of his thinking here: time counts for more than space." PS, 121.

³⁷ Helen Liggett, *Urban Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 174.

and space are intimately related”³⁸ and when he writes that “time is distinguishable but not separable from space.”³⁹ This is a common link Lefebvre’s work shares with Reinhard Kuhn who argues that boredom is “inextricably linked with the notion of time and space.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, Kuhn does not go on to expound this assertion, but his point is nevertheless well taken. In Lefebvre’s work, it is implicitly argued that boredom necessarily requires an emphasis on space, but one that does not neglect time. The foundation for this assertion can be found in Lefebvre’s book *The Survival of Capitalism* when he establishes a connection between everyday life, space, and boredom:

It is the everyday that carries the greatest weight. While Power occupies the space which it generates, the everyday is the very soil on which the great architectures of politics and society rise up. It is still, however, ambiguous, a mixture of poverty and wealth. In the everyday, the unbearable is mixed up with pleasure, and unease with satisfaction. The concrete becomes abstract and abstraction concrete. Happiness easily becomes intolerable. The reproduction of the relations of production enlarges, we said, by reproducing the fundamental contradictions: the contradiction between happiness and boredom has turned into a running sore. The great positive minds will no doubt regard it as utterly utopian and unrealistic to introduce boredom into a theoretical and political discussion. For them, boredom doesn’t count. Really it doesn’t. Let’s not insist, however, on this curious contrast between realized boredom and promised happiness. Let us dwell instead on the *contradictions of space*.⁴¹

Taken together, it is through the ‘contradictions of space’ where one can get at the heart of the ‘curious contrast’ between boredom and happiness in everyday life. Further to this point, Lefebvre argues elsewhere in the same book that “the *contradictions of space*, yet to be discovered in their vastness, conceal those of time by displacing them, though not without adding new conflicts to them.”⁴² In addition to space, what lies nascent in Lefebvre’s work is the idea that boredom is a clue to the contemporary

³⁸ INT, 33.

³⁹ PS, 175.

⁴⁰ Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 5.

⁴¹ SC, 88-89.

⁴² SSW, 199.

situation in two interrelated respects. First, it is an indication of the dissatisfaction people have with everyday life in the modern world. Second, the experience of boredom is also utopian in the Lefebvrian sense of the term.⁴³ It is an indication that what is now is not desirable. Instead, something else, perhaps an unknown 'x', is desired. The basic definition of this utopianism can be found in Lefebvre's book *Everyday Life in the Modern World* when he writes: "Utopian? Yes indeed; we are all utopians, so soon as we wish for something different and stop playing the part of the faithful performer or watchdog."⁴⁴ This is where there is a common link between Marx's abovementioned definition of boredom as a 'longing for content' and Lefebvre's notion of utopianism. Rob Shields elaborates this point nicely at the beginning of his book *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle* when he argues that "Henri Lefebvre's humanistic Marxism highlights the importance of the felt experience of dullness, boredom and estrangement as a source of utopian inspiration and revolutionary resolve."⁴⁵ For Lefebvre, then, boredom is a potentiality for the revolutionary alteration of everyday life.

The Context of the Critique of Everyday Life

Though interest in Lefebvre, at least in the English speaking world, has increased a great deal since the 1991 publication of the translations for both the first volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life* and his book *The Production of Space*,⁴⁶ his work still largely goes unnoticed even by those who are writing about the same issues. For example, in the

⁴³ For in-depth analyses of the complexity of Lefebvre's utopianism, see two articles by Michael Gardiner: "Everyday Utopianism: Lefebvre and his Critics," *Cultural Studies* 18(2/3), (March /May, 2004): 228-254, and "Utopia and Everyday Life in French Social Thought," *Utopian Studies* 6(2), (2005), especially 96-103.

⁴⁴ ELMW, 75.

⁴⁵ Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1999), viii.

⁴⁶ For a summary of the impact of these two publications on English speaking scholars, see Stuart Elden, "Politics, Philosophy, Geography: Henri Lefebvre in Recent Anglo-American Scholarship," *Antipode* 33(5), (2001): 809-825.

acknowledgements section of her recent book on everyday life titled *Refiguring the Ordinary*, Gail Weiss wonders whether or not she has left something out, such as a specific text, a key figure, or perhaps even an entire intellectual current.⁴⁷ One name that went completely unnoticed was Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre, who has been referred to as the “grandfather of everyday life,”⁴⁸ the “quintessential critical theorist of everyday life,”⁴⁹ and “perhaps the most important theorist of the everyday,”⁵⁰ is an ideal guide to the complexities and excitement lurking within the mundane and trivial. So why did Weiss fail to recognize Lefebvre as a key theorist? Quite simply, Henri Lefebvre is a relatively unknown intellectual despite the incredibly prolific publication record he amassed over his 90 year lifetime.⁵¹ Stanley Aronowitz makes this clear in the title of his retrospective essay on Lefebvre’s career that he was and perhaps still is: “The Ignored Philosopher and Social Theorist.”⁵² Following one of Lefebvre’s major contemporary commentators, Stuart Elden, Lefebvre “remains to be discovered, rather than rediscovered.”⁵³ It is, therefore, appropriate to state that those interested in his work are going back to Lefebvre in the sense that Robert Hullot-Kentor wrote about going ‘back to

⁴⁷ Gail Weiss, *Refiguring the Ordinary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), xi.

⁴⁸ Tom Conley, “Afterword: Riding the Subway with Marc Augé,” *In the Metro* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 75.

⁴⁹ Michael Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2000), 71.

⁵⁰ Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 16.

⁵¹ There are a handful of bibliographies of Lefebvre’s work available in English, some of which are more complete than others. See Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle*, 190-204; Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 257-262; See David Harvey’s ‘Afterword’ in Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* for a brief summary of Lefebvre’s life and work and a partial bibliography, 425-434; *Henri Lefebvre and the Philosophies Group: A Bibliography* compiled by Joan Nordquist (Santa Cruz, CA: Reference and Research Services, 2001). This bibliography provides a keyword index, a list of background books, a listing of the secondary literature on Lefebvre, and the bibliographies of his associates from early in his career. For a detailed account of Lefebvre and the early associates of Lefebvre, see Bud Burkhard, *French Marxism Between the Wars: Henri Lefebvre and the “Philosophies”* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000).

⁵² For more on Lefebvre’s importance as an intellectual, as well as his obscurity, see Stanley Aronowitz, “The Ignored Philosopher and Social Theorist,” *Situations* 2(1), 2007: 133-156.

⁵³ Stuart Elden and Elizabeth Lebas, “Introduction: Coming to Terms with Lefebvre,” In KW, xi.

[Theodor] Adorno', which is "a return to what was never reached in the first place."⁵⁴ As far as intellectual interest is concerned, studying Lefebvre and everyday life parallels the study boredom. Both have largely been ignored in academia and their respective popularity amongst academics is relatively recent.

On the point of going back to Lefebvre, there are two issues with Lefebvre's work that make this difficult for English speakers: 1) the availability of Lefebvre's work on the one hand, and 2) its accessibility on the other. Only a fraction of Lefebvre's work has been translated into English. Even if there were a great deal of interest in him and these individuals could read the original French, the bulk of his material is long out of print. Furthermore, if it were all in print, Lefebvre can be difficult to understand. Described as a "frustratingly vague and rambling writer,"⁵⁵ Lefebvre's prose can be challenging to follow for even the most enthusiastic reader, yet I would argue that it ultimately rewards a reader's patience. His prose weaves and winds its way through his texts, vaguely alluding to numerous topics and theories, and suspending threads on one page only to pick it up a few dozen pages later or even in another text altogether.⁵⁶ Because of this his theoretical threads can be difficult to piece together. Not surprisingly, then, Derek

⁵⁴ Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Back to Adorno," *Telos* 81 (Fall, 1989), 5.

⁵⁵ Tim Dant, *Critical Social Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 74.

⁵⁶ This is a deliberate rhetorical move on Lefebvre's part. He explains this in his book *Introduction to Modernity* as follows: "Like life, any journey into the unknown takes time, and patience. There seem to be a great many people who want to know what everything is about even before they start, who just want conclusions. They demand assertions followed by arguments which can be skipped because the conclusions have already been established. Something like *Reader's Digest* should keep them happy. Here such procedures are impossible: the author is following a certain direction, but he has no clear idea of where it will lead him. Join him in the quest – if not, don't bother to look. If you already know what 'modernity' is, if you have a theory about the modern world, if you are determined to carol its praises or to condemn it out of hand, if you have already adopted a system, stop reading this book now. If you do go on reading it, you must agree to follow a winding path, with a few twists and turns here and there. You must allow the author to meander a bit. He promises – and it's his only undertaking – not to meander for ever." IM, 240. This is perhaps related to Lefebvre's contention that, at least for philosophers, "a straight line – a linear orientation, without deviations, without meanders – is generally a practical impossibility." CEL 1, 25. A nonlinear orientation is, according to Allen Repko, a necessity for interdisciplinary thinking. Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (London: Sage, 2008), 46.

Gregory has noted how “Lefebvre is a puzzle to most commentators on Western Marxism.”⁵⁷ Much the same as boredom has been referred to as a riddle, Lefebvre has been referred to as a puzzle. Perhaps being labeled as a “puzzle” has something to do with his project of a critique of everyday life, as Rita Felski explains: “Everyday life is the most self-evident, yet the most *puzzling* of ideas.”⁵⁸

Although there are three volumes of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, it is difficult to say where his project begins and where it ends. It virtually spans the entire length of his remarkable career.⁵⁹ His first article on everyday life was published in 1933,⁶⁰ but the first volume of his *Critique* (written in 1945) appeared in 1947 and was followed by a lengthy foreword of one hundred pages for the second edition published in 1958. The second volume was published in 1961, but this time Lefebvre began the work with 100 pages to ‘clear the ground’ instead of adding them later as was the case with the first volume. The third volume was published in 1981, but another book, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, appeared in 1968, which belongs alongside the three volumes of the critique. Additionally, his last published text, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and*

⁵⁷ Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 354.

⁵⁸ Rita Felski, “The Invention of Everyday Life,” *New Formations* 39, (1999/2000), 15. (my italics) Despite its ordinariness, everyday life is, nevertheless, puzzling. Lefebvre, who, it will be shown, views the everyday as the verso of modernity, has referred to the modern world as “that bloody riddle.” EE, 9. When the materials that have been presented so far in this dissertation are tallied up, both boredom and the modern world are referred to as riddles, whereas Lefebvre and the everyday are referred to as puzzles. While the subtitle of this introductory chapter refers to the integration of the riddle of boredom and the puzzle of Lefebvre, the everyday and the modern world are also important for this integration.

⁵⁹ Stefan Kipfer astutely notes that the critique of everyday life is Lefebvre’s “most enduring of projects.” DM, xxix. This is not to say, however, that there is no variation amongst the themes. There are both continuous and discontinuous elements over the course of the project. One example of a shift is his use of the concept of alienation. Whereas alienation was used as a major concept in the first volume of his *Critique*, it receives less attention in the second volume, barely any attention in the third volume, and is not even mentioned in the unofficial fourth volume: *Rhythmanalysis*.

⁶⁰ This essay, titled ‘Mystification: Notes for a Critique of Everyday Life’, was coauthored with Norbert Guterman. See KW, 71-83.

Everyday Life, is said to have been the fourth volume of the critique.⁶¹ Is it possible to delineate when or where Lefebvre's project begins or ends? Like the necessary boundary crossing with the topic of boredom, Lefebvre's work bursts at the seams, spilling over into many of his other works on the urban, space, modernity, etc.

Why is the everyday such a persistent thought of Lefebvre's? Mark Poster has claimed that "with daily life as the organizing concept, Lefebvre could discover historical tensions that were not named by previous Marxists. Daily life was characterized by boredom and passivity, wherein the masses viewed their society as a 'spectacle'."⁶² Further, Stuart Elden notes that "almost all of his writings can be seen as part of that large, multi-faceted and ongoing project."⁶³ For this reason, I omit italics from the 'critique of everyday life' in the title of this dissertation. That is, it is important to establish the idea that Lefebvre's critique extends beyond the three volumes of his *Critique* and, for the purpose of this dissertation, it will extend well beyond Lefebvre himself to include texts that help shape the so-called sociology of boredom Lefebvre proposed. Therefore, in order to utilize Lefebvre as a theoretical framework, one must transcend the boundaries of his texts.

⁶¹ Stuart Elden, "Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction," In RH, vii. Elden attributes this to Armand Ajzenberg.

⁶² Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 247. Regarding the use of the word 'spectacle', Poster is likely referring to Guy Debord and the Situationist International's concept of 'the society of the spectacle'. For the original source material, see Debord's, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994) and his follow-up *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso Press, 1998).

⁶³ Elden, "Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction," In RH, xv. In his book on Lefebvre, Elden offers a variation on this statement when he writes: "Indeed, the notion of everyday life is immanent to almost all of his work." Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 110.

Human Studies and Dialectical Method

Lefebvre's project of critiquing everyday life is specifically geared towards the humanities and social sciences, or a combination of the two: human studies.⁶⁴ In Lefebvre's theoretical framework, "human raw material" is "the substance of everyday life."⁶⁵ However, Lefebvre goes further than simply accepting the study of everyday life as one area of human studies amongst others when he writes: "In so far as the science of man exists, it finds its material in the 'trivial', the everyday."⁶⁶ Here, Lefebvre is more prescriptive in his assessment than descriptive. Inquiry into the mundane *ought* to be the focus of human studies. This is evident where Lefebvre asserts that the disciplines of "History, psychology and the science of mankind must become a study of everyday life."⁶⁷ Elsewhere, Lefebvre continues this thought by writing: "The human world is not defined simply by the historical, by culture, by totality or society as a whole, or by ideological and political superstructures. It is defined by this intermediate and mediating

⁶⁴ As for boredom and humans, according to Bertrand Russell, boredom is a distinctly human experience and no animal can "experience anything analogous to boredom." In *The Conquest of Happiness* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1930), 57. Erich Fromm similarly argues that "man is the only animal that can be bored." *The Sane Society*, 24. Robert Nisbet also argues that boredom is a unique experience for humans and contrasts it with apathy, which he believes both humans and animals can experience. See his two short pieces: "Boredom," *Commentary*, (September, 1982): 48; "Boredom," In *Prejudices: a Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 23. Jerome Neu asks: "Do animals suffer from boredom? How would we know if they did?" Neu thinks that instead of boredom stemming from within such as it does for humans, "reactive boredom may make sense for animals," because he believes animals may not be equipped with the self-consciousness necessary to experience boredom "from within." In "Boring from within: endogenous versus reactive boredom," *Emotions in Psychopathology: Theory and Research*, (eds.) William F. Flack, Jr. & James D. Laird, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 169. If it is true that only humans experience boredom, this would certainly make the purchase of a book such as Nikki Moustaki's *Boredom Busters for Dogs: 40 Tail-Wagging Games and Adventures* (Irvine, CA: BowTie Press, 2010) ineffectual for altering a dog's sluggish and/or hyperactive behaviour.

⁶⁵ CEL 1, 97. This can be compared with Fredric Jameson's claim of "culture as the very substance of everyday life." In "Future City," in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2008), 575. When combined, a conceptual triad emerges: human-everyday life-culture. In this light, Lefebvre's critique of everyday life can be thought of as meshing, if not fully compatible, with the broader fields of cultural studies and human studies.

⁶⁶ CEL 1, 133.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

level: everyday life.”⁶⁸ Additionally, Lefebvre believed that “the study of life and of ‘human raw material’ is the great precept of dialectical method.”⁶⁹ It would follow, then, that a study of everyday life following Lefebvre is a dialectical one.

What exactly is dialectical methodology? There are, of course, numerous variations.⁷⁰ While far too complicated to delve into here, it should be noted that Lefebvre’s dialectical approach is different from Marx’s as well as Hegel’s,⁷¹ two of the largest pillars of dialectical thought. It is best summarized when Lefebvre writes:

This, then, is what is new and paradoxical: the dialectic is no longer attached to temporality. Therefore, refutations of historical materialism or of Hegelian historicity cannot function as critiques of the dialectic. To recognize space, to recognize what “takes place” there and what it is used for, is to resume the dialectic; analysis will reveal the contradictions of space.⁷²

⁶⁸ CEL 2, 45.

⁶⁹ CEL 1, 191. As well, according to Allen Repko, dialectical methodology is vital to all forms of interdisciplinary inquiry. He writes: “In many ways, dialectical thinking is the opposite of disciplinary thinking, but it is an important skill of the interdisciplinarian and is a method that underlies interdisciplinary work.” Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research*, 45. Repko here follows Walter A. Davis who writes: “Dialectic is thus the method of interdisciplinary thought; all its procedures are based on the insight that all problems and questions are necessarily interrelated.” Walter A. Davis, *The Act of Interpretation: a Critique of Literary Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 95.

⁷⁰ For a thorough account of the variations of dialectical thought, see Fredric Jameson’s *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso Press, 2009).

⁷¹ Lefebvre clarifies this point as follows: “The dialectic is back on the agenda. But it is no longer Marx’s dialectic, just as Marx’s was no longer Hegel’s. Besides, it does not much matter what Hegel and Marx wrote about this or that in particular, and especially about the dialectic. What matters is to grasp movement and non-movement in the *present*, to grasp what it is that shifts and collides with that which does not shift. The dialectic has gone through some difficult times, but it has probably emerged strengthened from the test. The same goes for truth, which has been shaken by the dialectic.” SC, 14. An example of the ‘difficult times’ of the dialectic can be found in Heidegger’s magnum opus *Being and Time* where he writes that “the ‘dialectic’, which has been a genuine philosophical embarrassment, becomes superfluous,” 47. Lefebvre’s version of the dialectic, then, is one that is different than both Hegel’s and Marx’s, and one that attempts to combat criticism such as Heidegger’s. For diverse takes on Lefebvre’s dialectic, see Ed Soja, “The Socio-Spatial Dialectic,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 70(2), (June, 1980): 207-225; Christian Schmid, “Henri Lefebvre’s Theory of the Production of Space: Towards a Three-Dimensional Dialectic,” *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena et al., (London: Routledge, 2008), 27-4; Rob Shields, “The Father of the Dialectic and Critic of Structuralism,” In *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle*, 109-126.

⁷² SC, 17. “Dialectical thinking,” according to Lefebvre, “has never ceased to evolve nor new aspects of it to appear, both in the lifetime and the writings of Marx and Engels, and since.” DM, 98. This is due to the fact that, for Lefebvre, “dialectical reason knows that *its* work can never be completed.” CEL 1, 76.

Lefebvre argues that “dialectical reason grasps real movements.”⁷³ That is to say, the movements are actually existing, material processes, and not simply mental exercises. Furthermore, what Lefebvre calls a “dialectical relation” is defined as “unity in opposition,”⁷⁴ or a “contradiction within a unity.”⁷⁵ To analyze such dialectical relations, Lefebvre often employs triads in order to critically analyze this ‘unity in opposition’.

Lefebvre argues that “dialectics allows for the analysis of becoming, that is to say, of time, more or less connected to space, something that can only be conceived in three conflictual moments.”⁷⁶

Along with its dialectical approach, Lefebvre’s study of everyday life is also an inherently interdisciplinary one, as Joe Moran makes clear as follows:

The study of everyday life is thus interdisciplinary not simply because it encompasses material overlooked by the existing disciplines, but because it forms a kind of connecting glue which shows how these established systems of thought are ultimately related to each other, even as they attempt to deny this relationship.⁷⁷

Lefebvre himself viewed his study as one that necessarily crosses boundaries, arguing that the “[c]ritique of everyday life is not intended to be a new specialism, or a particular

⁷³ IM, 141.

⁷⁴ RH, 8. One important dialectical relation theorized by Lefebvre that will be employed throughout this dissertation is the unity between the opposites of negative and positive. To Lefebvre, the two seemingly incompatible terms are dialectically intertwined, as “the positive is negative, but what is most negative is also what is most positive.” CEL 1, 72. Furthermore, Lefebvre writes: “Our thesis is that the negative is also positive, and that it is not a bad thing to overcome the separation between the positive and the negative.” CEL 2, 56. Following a tradition of critique, Lefebvre often begins his works with negative remarks. On the surface, this may appear as destructive, but the actual purpose is to create something new rather than simply destroy something old. The idea is that “the negative serves to bring out what is essential and positive for dialectical thought.” SM, 34. Following Lefebvre, I will utilize this methodological tool to invert certain texts in order to create a positive argument. According to Allen Repko, differences, tensions, and conflicts are all part of the integrative process of interdisciplinary work. Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research*, 46.

⁷⁵ PS, 353.

⁷⁶ TLCP, 86. For more on Lefebvre’s use of triads, see his “Triads and Dyads” in KW, 50-56.

⁷⁷ Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (London: Routledge, 2001), 68.

branch of sociology.”⁷⁸ In addition to the fluidity of Lefebvre’s project of a critique of everyday life, Stuart Elden has noted a similar difficulty in affixing a rigid label to Lefebvre in a standard academic discipline. To Elden, “[i]t is not a simple task to compartmentalize his work into convenient academic departments, as even within single works he cuts across disciplines.”⁷⁹ On this point, Lefebvre would write that “[i]deas have boundaries. We must do everything in our power to find out where these boundaries lie, and if we are to map them out we must cross them.”⁸⁰

In this light, what Lefebvre refers to as a ‘sociology of boredom’ in the context of his critique of everyday life is much more accurately labeled as a thoroughly interdisciplinary ‘social philosophy of boredom’.⁸¹ My use of the term ‘social philosophy’ to describe Lefebvre’s project stems from Max Horkheimer’s inaugural address in 1931 at the Institute for Social Research, also known as the Frankfurt School.⁸² In this case, we can say that the Horkheimer’s use of the term ‘social philosophy’ is shorthand for his interdisciplinary integration of sociology and philosophy, or, as Horkheimer puts it, a “philosophically oriented social research” where the social sciences, though still retaining their core concepts such as society for sociology, are not

⁷⁸ CEL 2, 27.

⁷⁹ Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 4.

⁸⁰ CEL 2, 29.

⁸¹ While I would argue that it could also be labeled as a ‘critical theory of boredom’, Lefebvre would have perhaps referred to his proposed project as a ‘metaphilosophy’ of boredom, as he adopted this label for his work in the latter part of his career. In fact, the title Lefebvre gave to himself was ‘meta-philosopher’, which he elaborated throughout various writings. In a debate with Leszek Kolakowski he articulated the basic features of this title: “I consider myself a meta-philosopher, that is to say I don’t build a system. I aim to take from philosophy those ideas which are capable of arousing the critical consciousness, ideas that are destined for a higher and at the same time more profound consciousness of the world in which we live.” In Leszek Kolakowski and Henri Lefebvre, “Evolution or Revolution,” In *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind*, ed. Fons Elders (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), 202.

⁸² See Horkheimer, “The Present Situation of Social Philosophy,” 1-14. Horkheimer’s usage of the term is consistent with what Julie Thompson Klein refers to as “narrow interdisciplinarity” where integration “occurs between disciplines with compatible methods, paradigms, and epistemologies.” *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 63.

positivistic, but follow an interpretive approach.⁸³ Horkheimer's Frankfurt School colleague, Theodor Adorno, further clarifies this point when he articulates a simple, yet complex difference between philosophy and the social sciences: "Plainly put: the idea of science (Wissenschaft) is research; that of philosophy is interpretation."⁸⁴ While the two are different, Adorno does not detach the two, as evidenced in a sociology lecture where he exclaimed the necessity for "philosophy, which I refuse to divide strictly from sociology."⁸⁵ Fused together, one interprets social phenomena, such as boredom, with extensive research. Additionally, in Adorno's inaugural address he expands on his notion of interpretation, or of philosophy, as "riddle-solving."⁸⁶ With this, we can see a key for studying boredom. Recall Heidegger's claim that boredom is a 'riddle', mentioned at the beginning of this introduction. To solve this riddle, or at least advance a position that helps one get closer to understanding some aspect of the riddle, one must interpret it. Essentially, this is what Lefebvre did in his critique of everyday life,⁸⁷ so Lefebvre's

⁸³ Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy," 14. This could be called Max Horkheimer's vision of materialism, which he claims "requires the unification of philosophy and science." In "Materialism and Metaphysics," *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, (London: Continuum, 2002), 34. This could also be interpreted more generally as an integration of philosophy and the social sciences, such as when Richard Wolin comments, "[I]n Horkheimer's view, the two disciplines, philosophy and social science are necessary mutual complements. Empirical research that proceeds without the guidance of general concepts tends to churn out a mass of disunified and meaningless data – data for data's sake." Richard Wolin, *The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 48. Regarding philosophy and the social sciences, Jean Baudrillard has quipped that "philosophy leads to death, sociology leads to suicide." *Cool Memories V*, 72. In the spirit of Baudrillard's clever formulation, I argue that social philosophy leads to boredom.

⁸⁴ Theodor Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," In *The Adorno Reader*, 31. Jean Baudrillard is a suitable example for a philosopher's approach that distances itself from research, specifically library and/or archival research. He writes: "There is nothing worse than this obligation to research, to seek out references and documentation that has taken up residence in the realm of thought and which is the mental and obsessional equivalent of hygiene." *Cool Memories I*, 115.

⁸⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.

⁸⁶ Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," 32.

⁸⁷ Lefebvre's position on the interdisciplinary integration of philosophy and social sciences is strikingly similar to that of both Horkheimer and Adorno. With regards to the critique of everyday life, Lefebvre

proposed study of boredom would follow this same approach: a dialectical method that seeks to solve riddles through interpretation.

Ordinariness of Boredom

Similar to Lefebvre, Adorno has argued that “it is possible that a concern with apparently out-of-the way, obscure phenomena could lead to extraordinarily relevant social insights.”⁸⁸ While boredom is an ordinary, commonplace phenomenon, it is simultaneously one that is ‘out-of-the-way’ and ‘obscure’, which results in it receiving scant attention. The lack of attention is somewhat odd considering boredom is, by and large, an experience that is a feared bugbear of contemporary society. Lefebvre argues that “anything goes in the fight against boredom,”⁸⁹ and Erich Fromm similarly argues that “one of the main goals of man today is ‘escape from boredom’.”⁹⁰ That is, the desire to escape boredom occurs when one takes an ordinary view of boredom. One of the most succinct explanations of the ordinary conception of boredom is in Martin Heidegger’s lectures when he philosophizes:

How unfamiliar the essence of boredom and its origin remains and must remain to our everyday understanding is attested by the *ordinary assessment of boredom*. Boredom in the ordinary sense is disturbing, unpleasant, and unbearable. For the ordinary understanding all such things are also of little value, they are unworthy and to be condemned. Becoming bored is a sign of shallowness and superficiality. Whoever sets a proper task for his or her life and gives it content does not need to fear boredom and is secure in the face of it.⁹¹

argues that “it must blaze its own trail between philosophical reflections and fragmented and specialized research.” CEL 2, 5.

⁸⁸ Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, 17.

⁸⁹ INT, 32.

⁹⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 244.

⁹¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 158. Heidegger’s assertion that boredom ‘must remain’ unfamiliar to ‘our everyday understanding’ is a point of rupture with Lefebvre’s thought.

Similar to Marx, Heidegger touches on the relationship between boredom and ‘content’ in life, or lack thereof. With its emphasis on the unpleasant, Heidegger’s definition can be placed alongside the following passage from Fromm:

When boredom is mentioned, people think, of course, that it is not pleasant to be bored, but they do not think it is a serious matter. I am convinced that boredom is one of the greatest tortures. If I were to imagine Hell, it would be the place where you were continually bored. In fact, people make a frantic effort to avoid boredom, running away to this, that, or the other, because their boredom is unbearable. If you have “your” neurosis and “your” analyst, it helps you feel less bored. Even if you have anxiety and compulsive symptoms, at least they are interesting! In fact, I am convinced that one of the motivations for having such things is escape from boredom.⁹²

Taken together, the two above passages from Heidegger and Fromm complement the other. They both demonstrate the dual aspects of the fear and ordinariness of boredom. In order to understand boredom, it is important to understand why people are running away from it and what leads them to believe they ought to run away from it in the first place.

As an experience that is equally detested and insignificant to so many, it is worth asking: Who actually experiences boredom? Arthur Asa Berger posits that “most people’s lives are very routine and boring.”⁹³ The Belgian artist and writer Marcel Broodthaers once wrote in a letter that “999 days out of 1,000, I am exposed only to boredom.”⁹⁴ For those like Broodthaers, boredom is the rule rather than the exception. Erich Fromm argues that while “many people would readily admit they are bored; very

⁹² Erich Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 181.

⁹³ Arthur Asa Berger, *Ocean Travel and Cruising: a Cultural Analysis* (New York: Haworth Hospitality Press, 2004), 74.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Marcel Broodthaers: Open Letters, Industrial Poems,” *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 97.

few would admit that they are boring.”⁹⁵ Taking a different perspective, Northrop Frye argues that “a man is bored because he bores himself.”⁹⁶ Dennis Brissett and Robert Snow claim that “[m]ost everyone knows a bore; most everyone at some point in their life has been bored.”⁹⁷ However, “some people,” argues Orrin E. Klapp, “say they are never bored.”⁹⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, believing such claims to be highly dubious, has a response to these individuals:

People today who still have time for boredom and yet are not bored are certainly just as boring as those who never get around to being bored. For their self has vanished – the self whose presence, particularly in this so bustling world, would necessarily compel them to tarry for a while without a goal, neither here nor there.⁹⁹

Klapp also counters the claim of never being bored by saying boredom is experienced by “some people much of the time and almost everyone some of the time.”¹⁰⁰ Søren Kierkegaard is succinct in his assessment when he quips that “all men are bores.”¹⁰¹ Amongst all of these passages it would seem that the people who claim to have never experienced boredom appear to be in the minority. For these few, is it because they simply do not have time to be bored, or, as Kracauer puts it, do they have the time for boredom but do not become bored? To Kracauer, they may not be bored, but they are boring other people. Lars Svendsen hazards a “guess that almost one hundred per cent of

⁹⁵ Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 243.

⁹⁶ Northrop Frye, “Leisure and Boredom,” In *Northrop Frye on Literature and Society, 1936-1989: Unpublished Papers*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 226.

⁹⁷ Dennis Brissett and Robert P. Snow, “Boredom: Where the Future Isn’t,” *Symbolic Interaction* 16(3), (1993): 237.

⁹⁸ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 11.

⁹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, “Boredom,” *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 331.

¹⁰⁰ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 30.

¹⁰¹ Søren Kierkegaard, “The Rotation Method,” *Either/Or, Vol. I* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1959), 284. This was written under a pseudonym, so attributing it strictly to Kierkegaard is a problematic issue that cannot be resolved or considered in the appropriate depth in the scope of this dissertation. For the present purposes, the issue of pseudonyms and the attribution of authorship will be set aside.

the population suffers from boredom in the course of their life.”¹⁰² Richard Bargdill goes one step further and claims “at some point in everyone’s life there is an experience of being bored.”¹⁰³ Michael Raposa in the introduction to his book *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* writes, “[t]he experience of boredom, sooner or later, now and then, seems inevitable for most persons.”¹⁰⁴ At the end of his book, Raposa is much more optimistic when he writes: “boredom is never inevitable.”¹⁰⁵

Historical and Geographical Parameters

The diverse range of comments from the various authors listed in the above paragraph demonstrates the lack of a consensus on the cause, prevalence, and inevitably of boredom. As for Lefebvre, while speaking from an everyday life perspective, he writes that “ [t]he ‘worldwide’, the ‘planetary’ are already synonyms for the world of boredom, where the maelstrom of technicity leaves human relations and everyday life in its wake like so much stagnant jetsam.”¹⁰⁶ That is, Lefebvre identifies a trend in perception regarding the world as a boring thing. Along these same lines, Klapp lists numerous countries as examples of widespread boredom, such as Sweden, France, Japan, Britain, United States, Switzerland, and the former Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷ This is consistent with Elizabeth Goodstein’s point that in the context of modernity “the phenomenon is

¹⁰² Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 15.

¹⁰³ Richard W. Bargdill, “The Study of Life Boredom,” *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 31(2), (2000): 188.

¹⁰⁴ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, xi.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁰⁶ IM, 223. Roughly 50 years after Lefebvre wrote these words, McKenzie Wark echoes his sentiment and discusses many of the same issues tackled by Lefebvre: “We are bored with this planet. It has seen better centuries, and the promise of better times to come eludes us. The possibilities of this world, in these times, seem dismal and dull. All it offers at best is spectacles of disintegration. Capitalism or barbarism, those are the choices. This is an epoch governed by this blackmail: either more and more of the same, or the end times. Or so they say. We don’t buy it. It’s time to start scheming on how to leave the twenty-first century. The pessimists are right. Things can’t go on as they are. The optimists are also right. Another world is possible. The means are at our disposal. Our *species-being* is a builder of worlds.” *The Beach Beneath the Street*, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 20-23.

international.”¹⁰⁸ With the advent of modernity, people can be bored around the world.

Lefebvre touched on this point in a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor in his book

Introduction to Modernity:

My dear chap, everyone is bored already. I mustn't exaggerate – not bored to death, nor bored to death with not dying, as a mystic might say – or a nihilist, which is the same thing. People are more bored in advanced countries like the USA and Sweden than they are in Africa or Yugoslavia, or even in this dear old France of ours. Don't let's mention the Soviets or the Chinese, they haven't time to get bored, to get bored you need leisure. Those good people are workers, they produce; they are told that production is synonymous with satisfaction. Maybe they believe it is. If so, so much better for them, so much the worse for us. Even so, they have some fairly pressing needs, but they go on waiting; they get less bored than we do. In my opinion it is modern boredom which poses the problem of style in life.¹⁰⁹

Here, it is evident that, to Lefebvre, it is the advanced (i.e. industrialized) countries¹¹⁰

where boredom is most prevalent. This passage builds upon a similar discussion

Lefebvre had a few years prior. In his autobiography, written in 1958, Lefebvre

discusses the importance of boredom in the critique of everyday life. He asks: “If it is

true that the U.S. and Sweden represent the contemporary *civilization of boredom*, where

does this profound boredom come from? Do satisfaction and boredom go together?

Must we maintain a dialectical movement of 'satisfaction-dissatisfaction', and how?”¹¹¹

With his identification of the ‘internal dialectic of mass culture’ as a key for analyzing

boredom, it would appear that he answered his own question.

¹⁰⁸ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 107.

¹⁰⁹ IM, 353.

¹¹⁰ PS, 305.

¹¹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *La Somme et le reste* (Paris: Bélibaste, 1973), 267. (my translation) The passage in original French is as follows: “S’il est vrai que les U.S.A. ou la Suède contemporaine représentent *la civilisation de l’ennui*, d’où vient cet ennui profond? La satisfaction et l’ennui vont-ils ensemble? Faut-il entretenir un mouvement dialectique ‘satisfaction-insatisfaction’, et comment?”

Fredric Jameson has written that “boredom is a very useful instrument with which to explore the past, and to stage a meeting between it and the present.”¹¹² As for this dissertation, while earlier times are discussed, the primary concern is with the twentieth century and the adventure of boredom throughout this century. This stands in contrast with the majority of boredom literature which predominantly concerns itself with the mid-1800s through to the early 1900s. Elizabeth Goodstein and Patricia Meyer Spacks, for example, in their respective studies focused on texts written during or written about this time period that are largely focused on Western Europe. The present study will depart from this by predominantly focusing on texts from and about the twentieth century and on both American and European analyses. Much has been written on the boredom plaguing Europe, so this is not much of a stretch. But why add America? Boredom’s ubiquity in America is exemplified by a story that ran in the November, 1974 issue of *Harper’s Magazine* with the title ‘Boredom: The Most Prevalent American Disease’.¹¹³ Could the land of opportunity be the land of boredom?

Not only is boredom prevalent in America, but, as Lefebvre argues, “boredom is the great fear in America.”¹¹⁴ Lefebvre is not alone with this sentiment. Another French intellectual, Simone de Beauvoir, also argues that boredom is a major component to everyday life in the United States. “The arid basis of American life,” according to de

¹¹² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 303.

¹¹³ See Estelle R. Ramey, “Boredom: The Most Prevalent American Disease,” *Harper’s Magazine*, (November, 1974): 12-14; 18-20; 22.

¹¹⁴ INT, 32. Erich Fromm theorizes something similar with regards to the ‘modern [hu]man’ in general. He writes: “Aside from the fear of physical illness, or of being humiliated by the loss of status and prestige, the fear of boredom plays a paramount role among the fears of modern man. In a world of fun and amusement, he is afraid of boredom, and glad when another day has passed without mishap, another hour has been killed without his having become aware of the lurking boredom.” *The Sane Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955), 203.

Beauvoir, is none other than “boredom.”¹¹⁵ In his aptly titled travelogue *America*, yet another French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, writes that “whatever the boredom, the hellish tedium of the everyday in the US or anywhere else, American banality will always be a thousand times more interesting than the European – and especially the French – variety.”¹¹⁶ Following Baudrillard, if an ‘interesting’ study of boredom is at all possible – and it should be remembered that Baudrillard was skeptical about this – it ought to have a substantial focus on America. Boredom and America seem to go hand in hand for these French theorists. It is as though boredom is as American as apple pie and baseball. But is this merely a French bias? Regarding America, Erich Fromm (a German) writes: “Here, and throughout the Western world, our problem is not cruelty, it is not destructiveness: it is *boredom*. Life is meaningless. People live, but feel they are not alive; life runs out like sand... Such people sense that they live in a world in which they should be excited, interested, active, yet they seem to be dead and inhuman.”¹¹⁷ Fromm’s fellow Frankfurt School member, Adorno, who is also German, though not explicitly referring to boredom, essentially outlines its material conditions: “When you come to America, everywhere looks the same. The standardization, the product of technology and monopoly, is disconcerting.”¹¹⁸ The famed English novelist Rudyard Kipling, too, found America to be the land of boredom. In a letter to William James written August 31st 1896, Rudyard Kipling claims: “Half your trouble is the curse of America – sheer,

¹¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, trans. Carol Cosman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 386.

¹¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso Press, 1988), 86. For Baudrillard, studying America is, in a way, a window with a view of the rest of the world. He would write that there is a certain “stupidity of all commercial or cultural anti-Americanism. As if Americanism did not run through every society, every nation, and every individual today, like modernity itself.” *Fragments: Cool Memories III*, 67.

¹¹⁷ Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture*, 174-175.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: a Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 243.

hopeless, well-ordered boredom; and that is going some day to be the curse of the world.”¹¹⁹ Kipling was not writing from a far away land, theorizing America from afar, but was actually writing from Morristown, New York. Finally, Americans themselves have noted the relationship of boredom and their homeland. In a letter to Allen Ginsberg dated July 10th, 1953, American author William S. Burroughs wrote: “In the U.S. you have to be a deviant or die of boredom.”¹²⁰ Coincidentally, a great deal of my writing for this dissertation has taken place in America.

Dissertation Outline

While Lefebvre failed to realize his proposed study of boredom, there are, nevertheless, several fragments scattered throughout his writings offering clues. By culling them together,¹²¹ by constructing a constellation, the basic framework of Lefebvre’s thought regarding boredom begins to take shape. I argue that there are six key elements to Lefebvre’s proposed study of boredom. First, as a ‘sociology of boredom’, it

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Ralph Barton Perry’s *The Thought and Character of William James* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), 228

¹²⁰ William S. Burroughs, *The Letters of William S. Burroughs: 1945-1959*, ed. Oliver Harris (New York: Viking, 1993), 185. Burroughs then goes on to state that all intellectuals in the United States are deviants.

¹²¹ In a certain sense, culling together fragments is similar to Walter Benjamin’s proposed method of a ‘literary montage’ for his *Arcades Project*. As Benjamin puts it: “Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.” Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999), 460. Clearly, a literary montage of boredom as the sole methodological approach is not suitable for a dissertation; however, it would provide a wealth of information on this modern phenomenon. For an example that approaches, but does not quite realize a literary montage of boredom, see Jon Winokur’s *Ennui to Go: the Art of Boredom* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2005). Since these fragments are scattered throughout literature, culling them together can be difficult. For example, Jane Marsh has noted the problem of searching for boredom as a keyword: “Because it seemed part of a common experience I thought it would be useful to look at other people’s work, and learning about boredom. Imagine my surprise when a computer search revealed no references to boredom. Not only did there appear to be no relevant material, but no material at all.” Jane Marsh, “The Boredom of Study: The Study of Boredom,” *Management Education and Development* 14 (part 2), (1983), 125. With regards to the use of fragments, I follow Jean Baudrillard in asserting that each fragment contains a wealth of insight. He writes: “Of course, each fragment could become a book. But the point is that it will not do so, for the ellipse is superior to the straight line.” *Fragments: Cool Memories III*, 8.

is primarily concerned with modern society. Second, the rise of boredom as a mass phenomenon is tied to the historical processes of industrialization. Third, contradictions of space are important factors for his thought in general, but understanding boredom in particular. Fourth, there is a utopian element to the experience of boredom (longing for content). Fifth, boredom is related to style of life. Sixth, and perhaps most importantly, there is an internal dialectic of mass culture that is linked with the perpetuation of boredom. These six interrelated elements all fit within the context of Lefebvre's historically specific study of everyday life, all of which will be explored throughout this dissertation.

The goal of this dissertation is to pick up where Lefebvre left off by incorporating the theoretical framework of his critique of everyday life into a study of boredom. The guiding thesis is that what Lefebvre identified as the 'internal dialectic of mass culture' is a key for understanding boredom in modernity. That is, there is a connection between the mass culture of modernity and the historical uniqueness of boredom as an experience. To contribute towards an understanding of boredom, it is important to examine some elements of modernity's mass culture. For this, I argue that Lefebvre's project, the critique of everyday life, is an important but incomplete point of departure. This dissertation, then, will be much more Lefebvrian than explicitly about Lefebvre.

This dissertation consists of five chapters, the organization of which is modeled after Lefebvre's dialectical thought.¹²² Each chapter is interrelated and develops a

¹²² The structure of this dissertation stems from a passage in volume two of Lefebvre's *Critique*. At the end of the introduction, or what Lefebvre calls 'clearing the ground', he outlines the necessary components for his project. The ultimate academic goal is to gain insight into today's society as a whole: modernity (chapter 1). For this, he argues that what must be studied are "the links between everyday life, the modern city and housing developments; the place and the future of art in the so-called modern world, etc." CEL 2, 99. This one sentence gives the precise flow of chapters 2-5 of my dissertation. Chapter 2 is concerned

continuity and discontinuity with the preceding chapter. The chapters are related, yet ultimately different. The first chapter is a review of the boredom literature with a specific focus on boredom's relationship to history in general and modernity in particular. The second chapter continues this discussion by incorporating Lefebvre's concept of everyday life with boredom and modernity. With the first two chapters, then, we have what Lefebvre refers to as "two inter-dependent realities,"¹²³ modernity and everyday life. Lefebvre states that together "modernity and everydayness constitute a deep structure that a critical analysis can work to uncover."¹²⁴ It is in the second chapter where Lefebvre's basic definition of boredom as the absence of style in everyday life will be discussed.¹²⁵ The third chapter takes the 'deep structure' of modernity and everyday life developed in the first two chapters and develops it by considering the general tendencies of modern urbanism¹²⁶ from the path-breaking (both literal and figurative) planning project of Haussmann, the predominance of the money economy, the 'machines for living' by Le Corbusier, through to the wave of 'new town' planning. The third chapter focuses on the centre; the fourth chapter focuses on the peripheries. The fourth chapter extends this discussion of urbanism by turning to a tendency of twentieth century planning, especially

with everyday life, chapter 3 with urbanism (modern city), chapter 4 with the suburbs (housing developments), and chapter 5 with the culture industry (art).

¹²³ ELMW, 24.

¹²⁴ EE, 10-11.

¹²⁵ Michael Gardiner has noted that because Lefebvre never systematically studied boredom, he often used the term in contradictory ways. Gardiner, "Henri Lefebvre and the 'Sociology of Boredom'," 40. In referring to Lefebvre's view of boredom, I do so within the context of it being linked to his corresponding concept of the 'absence of style in everyday life'.

¹²⁶ The third chapter focusing on the urban, or the centre, follows the second chapter on everyday life in order to remain consistent with Lefebvre's work. As Stuart Elden notes, in referring to Lefebvre: "His work on everyday life can be seen as providing the foundation for his studies on urban [...] life." *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 9. Lefebvre himself made the intertwining of the two by arguing that the everyday and the urban are "indissolubly linked." WC, 185,

after World War II, suburbanization.¹²⁷ Whereas the third chapter predominantly discusses Europe, the fourth chapter will largely discuss America. Here, the neglected figure of the bored housewife will be examined, in addition to the tacky-tacky housing schemes and big box stores found around the country, along with the influx of televisions in particular and technology in general into everyday life. The fifth chapter will build on the discussion in the fourth chapter of suburbia's penchant for consumption. Specifically, this final chapter will integrate Lefebvre's theory of consumption with the Frankfurt School's concept of the 'culture industry'. Here, certain sounds and images of the culture industry will be juxtaposed alongside avant-garde sounds and images. Specifically, the culture industry's production of sound in the form of popular music will be contrasted with the Fluxus group (particularly John Cage) and their use of boredom in music. The discussion will then shift to the culture industry's production of images in the form of advertisements and will be followed by the importance of 'boring things' in Andy Warhol's Pop art.

As has been highlighted by Michael Gardiner in his book *Critiques of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre frequently quoted a passage by Hegel: "The familiar is not necessarily the known."¹²⁸ This serves as the unofficial slogan for Lefebvre's study of everyday life and

¹²⁷ Lefebvre argues that a study of the suburbs can only follow a study of the city: "They cannot be studied sociologically apart from the city and without a study of its problems." KW, 134. For this reason, I follow the theme of the urban in chapter 3 with the theme of the suburbs in chapter 4.

¹²⁸ Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life*, 1. It can be found in CEL 1 on pages 15 and 132. This passage comes from the famous preface of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, though it is less poetic in its two English translations: (1) "What is 'familiarly known' is not properly known, just for the reason it is 'familiar'." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 17; (2) "Quite generally, the familiar, just because it is familiar, is not cognitively understood." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. J.N. Findlay (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), 18. Lefebvre believed in the forcefulness of this passage so much he would argue that "Hegel's aphorism should appear at the beginning of any methodology of the social sciences." KW, 111. This admiration for Hegel's dictum can also be found in another work of Lefebvre's that has yet to be translated into English, but is of particular importance for human studies. He writes: "The first methodological principle of human studies can be found in an admirable formula from Hegel: The familiar is not necessarily the known." In

will serve as an unofficial slogan for my study of boredom. What I aspire to accomplish with what follows is an integration of the boredom literature with the theoretical framework offered by Lefebvre's critique of everyday life, along with additional material (often fragmentary) that both discusses boredom and is consistent with Lefebvre's project. I am looking at the familiar yet ultimately faintly known phenomenon of boredom.

In summary, to approach the problematic of boredom I have employed the work of the French interdisciplinary theorist Henri Lefebvre, specifically his project of a critique of everyday life, as a general framework, though one that requires considerable additions from external yet related material. It is hoped that boredom as an historically specific social phenomenon will be seen in a new light, one that makes it shine a little brighter.

the original French: Le premier principe méthodologique de la science de l'homme se trouve dans une admirable formule de Hegel: "Le familier n'est pas pour cela connu." *Méthodologies des sciences: inédit* (Paris: Anthropos, 2002), 126.

Chapter 1: The Rise of Boredom in the Modern World

[W]ith the advent of modernity,
the magic of the enchanted universe is forever lost,
reality will forever remain gray.¹ – Slavoj Žižek

Boredom becomes widespread when traditional structures of meaning disappear.² – Lars Svendsen

[T]hat most elusive of questions: modern boredom.³ – Ihab Hassan

* * * * *

In one of his most sprawling and lengthy texts, *Introduction to Modernity*, Lefebvre argues that the “boredom which certain aspects of ‘modernity’ exude like some kind of radioactivity is so immeasurably appalling that a return to the pleasure principle seems highly desirable.”⁴ Writing these words in 1961, what Lefebvre observed around him was a widespread acceptance of an atmosphere of boredom coupled with a utopian hope for something else. For many individuals, boredom is tolerated as long as the future promises something else, something better. What largely goes unrecognized is that the very same modernity that promises this better life is also the one that bores.⁵ To recognize this, the historical specificity of boredom must first be considered. It is important to ask the question: Why did boredom emerge simultaneously with modernity?

¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 58.

² Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 153.

³ Ihab Hassan, “A re-Vision of Literature,” *New Literary History* 8(1) (Autumn, 1976): 137.

⁴ IM, 258. Lefebvre’s proposed return to the pleasure principle (inspired by the work of Stendhal) is a reversal of Freud’s terms where one’s maturation is linked to one’s exiting the pleasure principle and entering the reality principle. Lefebvre is implicitly arguing that society follows the reality principle and should consider reversing its priorities. For more on Freud’s two principles, see Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (trans. and ed.) James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966), 443-444. Rob Shields has referred to Lefebvre as “one of the great theorists of modernity.” Shields, *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle*, 94.

⁵ In the third volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre explicitly links the era of modernity with the promise of happiness. He writes: “Modernity was promising. What did it promise? Happiness, the satisfaction of all needs. This *promesse de Bonheur* – no longer through beauty, but by technical means – was to be realized in daily life.” CEL 3, 49-50. While Lefebvre does not believe that modernity fulfilled its promise as an era of happiness, he does believe that previous time periods were fairly happy. So unlike the 20th century, he argues that “in the past there have been relatively happy periods – in the thirteenth century, perhaps, and in the first half of the sixteenth.” IM, 373. He goes on to say that he is a type of sixteenth century man.

Such a question, if it is to be taken seriously, takes both boredom and modernity as complex concepts. Lefebvre has noted that, much like boredom, people often speak of the ‘modern’ without acknowledging its historical specificity or complexity. Various utterances such as modern music, modern paintings, or modern times are spoken on a daily basis with little thought as to what ‘modern’ means.⁶

Neither the experience or concept of boredom nor the experience or concept of modernity is common knowledge. For this, links between these two concepts must be established. This is somewhat difficult, as one commentator notes, “we take modernity for granted, and we often are bored with it.”⁷ First, it should be asked: What or when exactly is modernity? From a Lefebvrian point of view, it is the present period and stretches back roughly two hundred years. Lefebvre refers to the modern era as “the nineteenth century, since the French Revolution.”⁸ He also distinguishes between “our modernity” and the pre-modernity of the nineteenth century. This may appear to be a contradiction; however, Lefebvre is referring to a characteristic of the modern world to reinvent itself over and over again. So, while the nineteenth century is indeed part of modernity, it is often viewed as another era altogether. Seen this way, there are several modernities within modernity.

So if boredom is indeed historically specific to recent times, why did boredom arise as a mass experience with modernity? What is it about this particular historical era that has created the material conditions for this experience? One of the most prominent boredom scholars, Elizabeth Goodstein, has argued that “the experience of boredom as

⁶ IM, 1.

⁷ Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1.

⁸ RH, 6.

we know it came into being in the aftermath of Enlightenment, as a product of the struggle to express how modern subjects lived problems of meaning in a world without God.”⁹ This passage from Goodstein’s book *Experience Without Qualities* is deceptively simple in its brevity. Goodstein’s assertion, as will be shown, can only be described as counterintuitive. Her basic argument is one that is fairly difficult to articulate since it goes against the common conception of boredom as something easily understood, as well as something that has always been and always will be. But if boredom is indeed an historical phenomenon, why is it the case that boredom is viewed as ahistorical? As Goodstein and fellow boredom theorist Patricia Meyer Spacks both argue, over the course of time, and especially throughout the twentieth-century, the experience of boredom has become naturalized.¹⁰ That is to say, the ahistorical picture of boredom has become a common sentiment over time; its historical specificity goes unnoticed. Such naturalization has undoubtedly played no small part in its characterization as trivial, inconsequential, and unworthy of serious inquiry.

Goodstein asserts that boredom is linked to what she calls the “democratization of skepticism”¹¹ where the masses are no longer tied to the idea of divine providence and are thus free to cast doubt upon anything and everything. Similar to Goodstein, in reference to the preceding two centuries, another major boredom theorist, Seán Desmond

⁹ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 408.

¹⁰ Ibid., 336; Spacks, *Boredom*, 272. Further to this point, anthropologist Yasmine Musharbash’s ethnographic study of the Australian Aboriginal settlement of Yuendumu was so difficult to conduct because of this naturalization of boredom. She writes: “Going through my field notes, I realized that boredom had been a sizeable aspect of the everyday but that, perhaps because of its normalcy, I had failed to collect systematic data about it and, what is more, that anthropology did not offer any frameworks within which to analyze this phenomenon.” In “Boredom, Time and Modernity: an Example from Aboriginal Australia,” *American Anthropologist*, 109(2), (June, 2007): 307.

¹¹ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 29.

Healy, has noted how “knowledge has poured in and skepticism has mounted.”¹² For Healy, the widespread accumulation of empirical facts has led to the ascendance of science¹³ and the decline of purely faith based interpretations of the world.¹⁴ In concert with this democratization of skepticism arose the ever flourishing, to use Lefebvre’s term, “double process,”¹⁵ of urbanization and industrialization. Although Goodstein would add ‘rationalization’ and ‘secularization’ to this constellation,¹⁶ she has also theorized such a double process: “In the mid-nineteenth century, as industrialization and urbanization transformed the European landscape, the problem of boredom emerged as a mass phenomenon.”¹⁷

Although he strove to prove boredom’s ancestral lineage, Ian Irvine would agree with Goodstein’s linking boredom with the processes of the modern world, such as when he writes how “chronic ennui was associated with the costs to the subject of urbanization, bureaucratization and the industrial revolution. In a sense, then, the concept was used to

¹² Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 101.

¹³ Commenting on the uneven development of civilization, Lefebvre writes: “The natural sciences were the first to progress. For a wide variety of reasons, certain sectors of knowledge and life lagged behind. The sciences of human reality (medicine, physiology and psychology – history – political economy and its applications, etc.) are still behind the natural sciences. As for practical, everyday life – a fundamental sector nevertheless – it is so backward that it can often appear unchanged or merely down-graded.” CEL 1, 247.

¹⁴ This is not to say that religion plays no role in the modern world; rather, it is one that is markedly different from times gone by. Lefebvre theorizes that “Religion will end in boredom; and to offer boredom to the Lord is hardly a living sacrifice.” CEL 1, 220. He then wonders if he is being hasty with this thought, as the same religious services have been taking place for ages and yet they have endured up until the present society.

¹⁵ The full passage helps to articulate Lefebvre’s use of this complex concept: “We have before us a *double process* or more precisely, a process with two aspects: industrialization and urbanization, growth and development, economic production and social life. The two ‘aspects’ of this inseparable process have a unity, and yet it is a conflictual process. Historically there is a violent clash between urban reality and industrial reality. As for the complexity of the process, it reveals itself more and more difficult to grasp, given that industrialization does not only produce firms (workers and leaders of private enterprises, but various *offices* – banking, financial, technical and political.” WC, 70. Despite being referred to as the double process of industrialization and urbanization, this chapter will focus mostly on the former of the two terms. Urbanization did not arise at the same time as industrialization; it is, according to Lefebvre, the inevitable outcome of the industrial process. ELMW, 194-195. The second part of the double process, urbanization, will be dealt with throughout the third chapter.

¹⁶ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

illustrate the dark side of modernity.”¹⁸ So there is at least some agreement in the literature that the city and the factory were the two spaces that initially established boredom as a mass phenomenon.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, according to the prominent architect Charles Jencks, “the major metaphor for modern architecture [is] the factory.”²⁰ Additionally, it has been said that for certain theorists “the boredom of everyday city life is the boredom of the assembly line, of one thing after another, of pieces locked in an infinite series that never really progress: the more it changes, the more it remains the same.”²¹ It is here where the ‘double process’ can be viewed as both a key feature of modernity and for the mass proliferation of boredom. But, again, what is modernity? In order to properly sketch the general contours of modernity it is important, in following the work of Lefebvre, to acknowledge that any “picture of modernity would be incomplete if we failed to sketch the relations of the modern with the past, and with history.”²²

¹⁸ Ian Irvine, “Acedia, Tristitia and Sloth: Early Christian Forerunners to Chronic Ennui,” *Humanitas* 12(1), (1999): 104.

¹⁹ Goodstein. *Experience Without Qualities*, 403.

²⁰ Charles Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 22.

²¹ Laurie Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 131. In the first section of the next chapter I will address Laurie Langbauer’s interpretation of Lefebvre.

²² IM, 224. Lefebvre is here alluding to what he would call his regressive-progressive method. Arguably, the clearest explanation for this method is given in *The Production of Space* where Lefebvre argues as follows. “Though it may seem paradoxical at first sight, this method appears on closer inspection to be fairly sensible. For how could we come to understand a genesis, the genesis of the present, along with the preconditions and processes involved, other than by starting from that present, working our way back to the past and then retracing our steps? Surely this must be the method adopted by any historian, economist or sociologist - assuming, of course, that such specialists aspire to any methodology at all.” PS, 66. While the previous passage was published in its original French in 1974, such an approach was present in Lefebvre’s work as early as 1939 with the publication of his book *Dialectical Materialism*. There he argues that “in order to elucidate modern industrial society, the analysis must go back to older societies.” DM, 94. The difficulty with this is establishing the cutoff point for one’s historical analysis. Nevertheless, this approach has been cited approvingly by Jean-Paul Sartre who in his *Search for a Method* finds Lefebvre’s approach to be of paramount importance. He writes: “[I]t is a Marxist, Henri Lefebvre, who in my opinion has provided a simple and faultless method for integrating sociology and history in the perspective of a

There are two main goals for this chapter: (1) To establish the coordinates of recent boredom scholarship and the varied takes on boredom's historical specificity via a review of the literature, and (2) to establish a general theoretical framework of modernity before continuing on with another key concept of this dissertation, which Lefebvre argues is the other side of the coin of modernity: everyday life. To accomplish these goals, I have divided this chapter into five parts. The first part analyzes two positions – Joseph Brodsky's and Bertrand Russell's – that are at odds with each other, as well as at odds with linking boredom exclusively with modernity. The tension found in these two pieces will serve as points of reference for the duration of the chapter. Part two explores a wide-range of positions on the possibility of the experience of boredom in pre-modern life with a special focus on the concepts of *acedia* and *ennui*. In addition, this section takes a general look at some of the historically specific ways of life in pre-modern times – the Middle Ages in particular – in order to distinguish them from modernity. Part three builds on the argument established in part two by discussing the hidden yet visible relationship between boredom and modernity and the unique shift in space-time experience brought by industrialization and urbanization. The fourth part examines one of modernity's principal technological advances, the railway, its impact on the world, and its relationship to boredom. The fifth and final part identifies a dialectical relationship theorized in Lefebvre's work between the interesting and boring. This dialectic is one of Lefebvre's original contributions to boredom studies, it is a key element to understanding boredom in modernity, and it will inform the rest of the dissertation.

materialist dialectic." Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 51.

Two Ahistorical Theories of Boredom

Two Nobel laureates – Bertrand Russell and Joseph Brodsky²³ – have theorized two of the more commonly held positions on the historical trajectory of boredom. Both have explored the topic of boredom in relatively brief ways, yet both of the respective pieces provide ample fodder for any discussion of boredom. What makes these two pieces so intriguing is that, although they both perpetuate the ‘ordinary’ conception of boredom, albeit in different ways, they also express important insights into boredom that are often overlooked. These are minor works by major thinkers, but I argue they both make major points on the often denigrated and supposedly minor subject of boredom. Because of the contradictions imbedded within, these pieces are ideally suited as points of departure for a dialectical study of boredom. Instead of strictly mining the major works of boredom, it is vital to the present study of boredom to acknowledge that penetrating insights are often found in unlikely places. To use a metaphor of Lefebvre’s, one cannot stare directly at the black sun of boredom in order to understand it; one also has to look where its rays are shining. The challenge is to either take brief glances before turning away, or, as is being argued here, look indirectly. It is the lesser quality of Russell and Brodsky’s respective pieces (with respect to their oeuvres) that reflects the experience of boredom more generally in that they are both usually overlooked.

1) Joseph Brodsky – In Praise of Boredom

The first example is Joseph Brodsky’s commencement address to Dartmouth College entitled ‘In Praise of Boredom’, delivered at a summer convocation ceremony in

²³ Both won the prize for their contributions to literature. Bertrand Russell received his award in 1950 and Joseph Brodsky accepted his prize in 1987.

July, 1989.²⁴ The title of the piece is counterintuitive, as praising boredom is an odd choice for a commencement address which surely goes against the grain of the usual commencement topics.²⁵ Brodsky's words of advice to the audience are summarized in two successive lines: "When hit by boredom, go for it. Let yourself be crushed by it; submerge, hit bottom."²⁶ The idea is that the sooner one wades through boredom's greyness, the sooner one can go on with one's life. Brodsky cautions the graduating class that "a substantial part of what lies ahead of you is going to be claimed by boredom."²⁷ This prophecy is based on Brodsky's view that humanity has endured "centuries of boredom."²⁸ Having completed all of their degree requirements, and having been well acquainted with what Michel de Certeau calls "the massive boredom of people at school,"²⁹ these (former) students were surely able to comprehend the general thrust of Brodsky's address.

Despite the boredom these students may have endured at one time or another throughout their higher education, Brodsky exclaims that they are now "entering the world" where there is going to be "plenty of dark and, what's worse, dull hours, caused

²⁴ For a perspective that fully endorses Brodsky's musings on boredom, see Karl E. Scheibe, *The Drama of Everyday Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 53-71.

²⁵ The series of books called *Boredom Busters* is representative of conventional wisdom, or, 'going with the grain'. These books often provide 'solutions' for eliminating boredom, especially amongst children. They often provide activities without actually studying boredom in any depth. For the most in-depth of these types of books, see Linda Deal, *The Boredom Solution: Understanding and Dealing with Boredom* (San Luis Obispo, CA: Dandy Lion Publications, 2003).

²⁶ Joseph Brodsky, "In Praise of Boredom," *On Grief and Reason* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1995), 108. Michael Raposa differs from Brodsky when he writes, "[t]o appreciate the value of boredom does not require that one welcome, much less celebrate, its occurrence." Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, xi.

²⁷ Brodsky, "In Praise of Boredom," 104.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 153. For a thorough analysis of boredom and education, see Ch.6 Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 118-140.

as much by the world outside as by your own minds.”³⁰ There are two important points being made here involving: 1) boredom and its study; 2) boredom and its immediate origins. The first point, then, is that students are now entering the world, as if they were outside of it while undertaking their higher education and, therefore, the ‘world’ could not have played a significant role in their experiences of boredom. To Brodsky, although universities and colleges may induce boredom, they do not analyze it, and, therefore, students would only know it as an experience, but not as a theoretical concept. In his estimation, it is not a topic of interest or importance and therefore classes are not offered on boredom nor are there boredom studies. He laments that “neither humanities nor science offers courses in boredom.”³¹ It would have come as a surprise to Brodsky to learn that Martin Heidegger devoted roughly 1/3 of his lectures from 1929/1930 specifically to the topic of boredom, which brings us to the second point. Heidegger’s lectures are also an important source for the second important point from Brodsky’s claim, that the roots of boredom are equally subjective and objective – the ‘world outside’ and in ‘your own minds’. In Heidegger’s lectures on boredom he argues: “The character of ‘boring thus *belongs to the object* and is at the same time *related to the subject*.”³² Heidegger summarizes as follows: “In short: boredom – and thus ultimately every attunement – is a hybrid, partly objective, partly subjective.”³³

So, what exactly, according to Brodsky, causes boredom? As stated above, the general idea is that both the world and our selves instil boredom. Expanding on this, he delves further into the phenomenon with a much more concrete cause. While

³⁰ Brodsky, “In Praise of Boredom,” 112.

³¹ Ibid., 104.

³² Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 84.

³³ Ibid, 88.

acknowledging that it “is a complex phenomenon,” Brodsky believes he has found its simple formula, and sums it up as “by and large a product of repetition.”³⁴ Brodsky goes so far as to say that “repetitiveness is boredom’s mother.”³⁵ Continuing with this metaphor, sameness, it would appear, gives birth to boredom. Repetition of any kind effectively induces boredom and, for Brodsky, there is nothing more repetitive than time. It is time that recurs over and over again. This is, of course, nothing new under the sun, but Brodsky gives this formulation a twist when he goes on to link time with social status. He argues that since the rich have money, and money buys time, it follows that the rich have more time than anyone. This abundance of time leads Brodsky to conclude that “nobody is as bored as the rich.”³⁶ This is at odds with Goodstein’s theorization of a ‘democratization of scepticism’ shared by the masses in the Western industrialized and urbanized society mentioned above. Unlike Goodstein, for Brodsky, the line of causality is the following: money–time–repetition–boredom. This effectively excludes the working class who, without very much money, cannot afford the time to be bored. This presents a rather circular problem. The rich endure the most boredom, but the rich are also those who can afford the most distractions. Is it possible that distraction causes boredom? Brodsky is silent on this point.

It is quite evident that there is no historical uniqueness to the experience of boredom in Brodsky’s theory of boredom. One reason for this is Brodsky does not differentiate between boredom and its supposed synonyms such as ennui and acedia. Instead, Brodsky takes what Seán Desmond Healy would call the “commonsense perception” (similar to Heidegger’s ‘ordinary’ perception mentioned in the introductory

³⁴ Brodsky, “In Praise of Boredom,” 104.

³⁵ Ibid., 105.

³⁶ Ibid., 106.

chapter of this dissertation) of boredom and treats the different terms as mere “aliases” for the same phenomenon.³⁷ Of course, a term like *acedia* is not a matter of simple commonsense since the majority of people do not use the term today.³⁸ Nevertheless, this commonsensical view of boredom does not even consider the possibility of a historico-social specificity of the experience. In this view, boredom has simply been around since the dawn of time. Ultimately, Brodsky believes boredom is an inevitable experience which we as a society should do our best to avoid, but, if it does arise, we must tarry with it.

What is most original in Brodsky’s theory of boredom is his advocacy for accepting the experience, if not inviting it, into one’s life. This is a largely counterintuitive notion. What is least original in Brodsky’s theory of boredom is its reliance on an ahistorical position. Richard Winter, another defender of an ahistorical position, is not as enthusiastic about the experience as Brodsky. Winter believes boredom is a fundamental flaw in the fabric of society, which can be remedied by “remembering the big picture” of God,³⁹ but its extensive history makes the eradication of boredom difficult. Regarding this history, Winter writes: “There is plenty of evidence that boredom has always existed.”⁴⁰ The crux of the historicity of boredom is predicated upon one’s acceptance of its aliases, or whether one views those concepts as referring to something else. That is, one either sees the similarities between the various terms, or one

³⁷ Ibid., 104.

³⁸ One notable exception is Kathleen Norris who, in her book *Acedia & Me*, wishes to revitalize the term for present day use. Norris’s book will be dealt with in further detail below.

³⁹ Winter, *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment*, 115-116. Winter would end his book claiming “As we see things more and more from God’s point of view, we find there is rarely time to be bored!” Ibid., 142.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 17.

disentangles boredom from a select few of its seemingly synonymous terms⁴¹ and it ultimately emerges as an historically specific mood.

2) *Bertrand Russell – The Conquest of Happiness*

The second example comes from the twentieth century analytic philosopher Bertrand Russell. Two commonalities between Brodsky and Russell should be highlighted first before delving into Russell's work. Much like Brodsky, Russell is of the opinion that 1) boredom has received far less consideration than it deserves and, in a somewhat related way, 2) boredom ought to be taught, especially to young people, as something that, if endured, is "essential to a happy life."⁴² These insights can be found in the fourth chapter of Russell's 1930 book *The Conquest of Happiness* titled 'Boredom and Excitement'. Here, one passage in particular leaps off the page. Near the beginning of the chapter, Russell makes the claim that "the machine age has enormously diminished the sum of boredom in the world."⁴³ Russell arrives at this conclusion by comparing the amount of what he calls 'amusements' that the urbanized machine age has bestowed upon humanity with the amusements that were, or better yet, were not available before the Industrial Revolution. When Russell uses the term amusements he is referring to such hallmarks of popular culture as films, novels, technologies, etc. By this definition, amusements have undoubtedly increased since Russell's essay was published over 80

⁴¹ As an example of boredom's linguistic complexity, Orrin E. Klapp lists the following 71 terms as possible synonyms for boredom: accidie (acedia), anhedonia, apathy, arid, banal, banality, blasé, burn-out, chatter, chatterbox, glazed eyes, hackneyed, harping, ho hum, humdrum, inane, insipid, insouciance, repetitious, routine, rut, sameness, satiety, soporific, stagnant, stagnation, sterile, chitchat, chore, cliché, cloying, dismal, doldrums, drag, dreary, dry, dull, dullness, effete, enervation, ennui, flat, irksome, jade, jaded, jejune, languor, lassitude, listless, long-winded, monotony, museum fatigue, pall, platitude, prolixity, prosaic, prosy, stuffy, stupefying, surfeited, tedium, tedious, tiresome, torpor, trite, trivia, uninteresting, verbosity, weariness, wearisome, world-weary." *Overload and Boredom*, 23. Klapp's extensive list can be contrasted with Martin Wagh's list: "In English, *boredom* has two synonyms: *ennui* and *tedium*." In "Boredom in psychoanalytic perspective," *Social Research* 42 (1975): 539. These two lists are indicative of the varied range of complexity boredom does or does not have for its researchers.

⁴² Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, 57.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 58.

years ago, which would mean, following Russell, that there would be even less boredom today than ever before. In fact, the further back in history Russell goes, the heavier and more pervasive boredom becomes.⁴⁴

As an example of Russell's conception of boredom throughout history, he constructs a thought experiment featuring a dull winter season in an entirely fictional medieval village. Its inhabitants cannot read or write to pass the time, they light up the darkness of night with candles, and they huddle together in the only room the heat from the fire can reach. As well, the village is isolated from other villages, as the connecting roads were impassable. With this description of the underwhelming experience of pre-modern life it would seem as though Russell was on to something, especially when one considers all of the excitement or amusements that can be found in contemporary society.

Russell's piece is essentially a philosophical reflection on boredom that is a brief yet salient analysis of what boredom is, what it is not, and why people experience it. In order to contain the experience as a concept, Russell erects some parameters for boredom by philosophizing about what it is not. To accomplish this, Russell argues that "the opposite of boredom, in a word, is not pleasure, but excitement."⁴⁵ This is the idea where the title of his essay – Boredom and Excitement – stems from. Unlike Brodsky, for Russell, money provides one with the opportunity to get away from boredom. That is, the more money one has, the more money can be spent on entertainment and excitement and, therefore, the more time appears to be chock-a-block full. Russell makes this point in the following way: "Those who have to earn a living get their share of boredom, of necessity, in working hours, but those who have enough money to be freed from the need

⁴⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

of work have as their ideal a life freed from boredom.”⁴⁶ Numerous people would surely agree with this assessment since those with a considerable amount of affluence seem to be able to step outside of the monotony of everyday life. Then again, the well-known platitude “money can’t buy happiness” would seem to fly in the face of this theory. If this commonplace observation is taken seriously, it would follow that money itself does not forestall boredom and bring on happiness.

To end this section, a brief summary of both Brodsky and Russell’s basic positions will be beneficial. Both thinkers link boredom to money. There is either a positive correlation between them, as is the case with Brodsky, or there is a negative correlation with them, as is the case with Russell. As well, in Brodsky’s convocation speech, there is a steady continuity of the experience of boredom throughout history. As long as time has been part of the cosmological picture, people have been bored with it. A common thread throughout all of history, then, is boredom. In Russell’s essay, there is no historical continuity; rather, there is actually a discontinuity with the experience of boredom. Russell would surely agree with Brodsky that there have been centuries and centuries of boredom, but would take exception with the idea that there has been an equal distribution of boredom throughout history. Perhaps, if the two thinkers were to have had a dialogue and compared notes, they would have come up with a third position on boredom’s history. That is, boredom is neither ahistorical nor largely diminished in recent times, but has actually flourished with modernity.

For Lefebvre, it is important to distinguish the signifier from that being signified. This is evident when he writes to an interlocutor: “Surely you’re not one of those people who believe that something or someone cannot exist until there is a word to label them

⁴⁶ Ibid., 60.

with!”⁴⁷ Indeed, the experience undoubtedly came before the name, not the other way around. However, as the English philologist Logan Pearsall Smith puts it, “when anything becomes important to us it finds its name.”⁴⁸ With this, the question arises: How much does the experience of boredom predate the language employed to articulate it? While one cannot pinpoint a specific date, or specific location, it is nevertheless pertinent to cast a backward glance at pre-modernity in order to understand modernity.

Acedia and Ennui

Following Elizabeth Goodstein’s pathbreaking study, one must begin with the following hypothesis: Pre-modern times are without boredom. To begin to expand on this it is worthwhile to briefly turn to the British sociologist Anthony Giddens who writes: “In all pre-modern cultures, including the large agrarian civilizations [...] the level of time-space distancing is relatively low as compared with the conditions of modernity.”⁴⁹ Giddens’ concept of time-space distancing should be underlined here. The experience of space and time was, in this view, simply different, and it would follow that the pace of life, the prospects for engaging with one’s environment, and the sense of belonging to a rigid cosmological order⁵⁰ were not the same in the pre-modern world as they are with the double process of industrialization and urbanization that are the hallmarks of modernity.

As is made clear in her book *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind*, Patricia Meyer Spacks offers a succinct explanation of the different expectations for life

⁴⁷ IM, 363-364. The interlocutor in this case is fictional. This is a prominent rhetorical device employed by Lefebvre throughout his writings as a form of Socratic dialogue.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 24.

⁴⁹ Anthony Giddens. *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 100.

⁵⁰ Harvie Ferguson illustrates this point as the pre-modern belief in the Great Chain of Being beginning with God all the way down to the lowliest of species. *Self-Identity and Everyday Life*, 50-51.

by noting: “If life was never *boring* in pre-modern times, neither was it *interesting*, *thrilling*, or *exciting*, in the modern sense of these words.”⁵¹ Although the pre-modern world may appear boring to people today – such as it did for Bertrand Russell – it very well could have been a meaningful society to inhabit at the time. One can look back on pre-modern times and compare all of the thrills and excitement available today and come to the hyperbolic conclusion that people were dying of boredom. However, that would be an incorrect assessment, as it would compare yesterday’s society with today’s standards.

Acedia

If there is one persistent terminological bugaboo that has continuously challenged the historical uniqueness of boredom, it is the medieval term: *acedia*. It does not persist in everyday discourse so much as it does in theological literature. Kathleen Norris, for example, does not distinguish between boredom and *acedia* in her 2008 book *Acedia & Me*. This is important to note considering Norris’s book was featured in the *New York Times* book review section,⁵² thus receiving the promotional advantages that many books on boredom are not fortunate enough to garner. Norris’ ahistorical perspective has its roots in one of the first comprehensive book-length studies of boredom, Reinhard Kuhn’s book *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature*. Although it is a book on what Kuhn describes as a specific form of boredom (*ennui*), the first part of his title ‘The Demon of Noontide’ is a reference to *acedia*. As Norris notes, “the desert monks termed *acedia* the noonday demon.”⁵³ The second part of Kuhn’s title ‘Ennui in Western

⁵¹ Spacks, *Boredom*, 10.

⁵² Kathryn Harrison, “Am I Blue,” December 21, 2008, *The New York Times Book Review*, 11. It is not without interest that the colour blue is associated with *acedia* in this review. I would argue that blue is much more suitable for depression and/or sadness than boredom, whereas grey is a much more suitable colour/noncolour for boredom.

⁵³ Kathleen Norris, *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer’s Life* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 5.

Literature' signifies boredom. The colon separating these two parts of the title, in a certain sense, is portrayed as an equal sign. The demon of noontide (*acedia*) is the same as ennui (boredom). Not surprisingly, Norris follows in the footsteps of Reinhard Kuhn. She acknowledges Kuhn as an author to whom she is "deeply indebted," because his text is an examination of "*acedia's* baleful effects on the human spirit over centuries."⁵⁴ It is also no surprise that she does not acknowledge the historical specificity of boredom when one considers that she makes no mention of the most forceful argument linking the two, which can be found in Goodstein's book. Norris ends her book with a smattering of quotations that are roughly in chronological order stretching all the way back to Anthony the Great, Seneca, and the Psalms, all the way up to contemporary scholars such as Orrin E. Klapp, Michael Raposa, and Lars Svendsen. Despite all of the passages that are quoted at the end of the book, Goodstein's book is noticeably absent. Norris's book was published three years after Goodstein's, so there is no immediate reason for having excluded it from consideration, despite it completely contradicting her own book.

In her book, Norris briefly discusses Brodsky's convocation speech and believes that although he was speaking to American university students, his words would have resonated with medieval monks.⁵⁵ Contra Norris, it could be argued that very little of Brodsky's speech would resonate with monks. Certainly, monks were not thinking about the new movies that are coming out, or about their turn in the car pool rotation, or even about the news report they saw on television the previous night. The technological advances necessary for these thoughts were still several centuries away. So what exactly were medieval monks contemplating? Of course, that would be impossible to fully

⁵⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 40.

answer. However, according to Lefebvre, “the monks in their cloisters contemplated death and could contemplate only death: they had to die in the ‘world’ so that the ‘world’ might be fulfilled.”⁵⁶ Norris would agree with Lefebvre on this point, as she notes in another one of her books St. Benedict’s dictum: “Keep death daily before your eyes” was an important guiding principle for monks.⁵⁷ Following Lefebvre, this not only answers *what* they were contemplating, but also *where* they were contemplating. Both the mental space and the physical space are important here. Although the monks were seeking to fulfill the world, cloisters were, interestingly enough, constructed to facilitate a “retreat from the world.”⁵⁸

Of course, medieval monks do not constitute a representative sample of medieval society; they are but one segment of a much larger mosaic of groups and individuals. However, monks are the group that are most often associated with acedia.⁵⁹ Harvie Ferguson notes, “daily life for a monk [...] was vastly different to that of a member of the nobility, or a townsman; and this was not a matter of economic resources alone but was an obligatory aspect of differentiated social orders.”⁶⁰ What about the average medieval person? James Burke offers the following description:

The medieval adult was in no way less intelligent than his modern counterpart. He merely lived in a different world, which made different demands on him. His was a world without facts. Indeed, the modern concept of a fact would have been an incomprehensible one. Medieval people relied for day to day information solely on what they themselves, or someone they knew, had observed or experienced in the world immediately around them. Their lives were regular, repetitive and unchanging.⁶¹

⁵⁶ PS, 254.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (London: Penguin, 1996), 8.

⁵⁸ PS, 379.

⁵⁹ For example, see Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 36; Spacks, *Boredom*, 11; Toohey, *Boredom*, 109-116.

⁶⁰ Ferguson, *Self-Identity and Everyday Life*, 54.

⁶¹ James Burke, “Communication in the Middle Ages,” *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society*, eds. David Crowley and Paul Heyer (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 74.

Burke's description not only speaks to the everyday situation in medieval times, but also the absence of Goodstein's concept of a 'democratization of skepticism'. While their lives were 'repetitive', they were not 'redundant' and as Michael Raposa puts it, "redundancy is a recipe for boredom."⁶² The democratization of skepticism that goes with modernity creates a space for a critique of the redundancy of repetition that would have been unavailable to pre-modern folks.

While stressing what she believes as the contemporary situation of acedia as boredom, Norris ponders, albeit in a rhetorical way, the relationship between boredom and God. She asks: "Might we consider boredom as not only necessary for our life but also one of its greatest blessings? A gift, pure and simple, a precious chance to be alone with our thoughts and alone with God?"⁶³ Instead of taking boredom to be a secular experience of the modern world akin to Goodstein's 'democratization of skepticism', Norris suggests it is an inherently Christian one where individuals are afforded the opportunity to (re)connect with their maker. Such an assertion casts doubt on her assimilation of the terms boredom and acedia. If acedia is a sin and boredom is not a sin, how can they be the same? Norris attempts to sidestep the general agreement that acedia is a sin by simply claiming it is not. This claim pinpoints a rift in the literature on boredom where, on the one hand, there are those who believe acedia is another name for boredom and, on the other hand, there are those who believe the experience of boredom is something entirely different than acedia. Norris's work clearly fits with the former of these two positions. Unfortunately, Norris does not grapple with the philological difficulties inherent in the study of boredom, which perhaps explains why she did not

⁶² Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 105.

⁶³ Norris, *Acedia & Me*, 40.

explore Goodstein's work, the most antithetical text to Norris's thesis of boredom as a modern day acedia.

Edward Peters remarks how most authors believe acedia to be "the remote ancestor of the modern concept of boredom."⁶⁴ Perhaps this is the case, but the diverse perspectives ought to be analyzed to reveal their differences along with their similarities. In his book *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, Michael Raposa traces the "extended theological reflection" of acedia back to the fourth century.⁶⁵ Lars Svendsen argues that "a crucial difference is that *acedia* is first and foremost a moral concept, whereas 'boredom', in the normal sense of the word, more describes a psychological state. Another difference is that *acedia* was for the few, whereas boredom afflicts the masses."⁶⁶ The emphasis on boredom as a *mass* phenomenon is a crucial distinction. Svendsen goes on to write that acedia was a "premodern precursor to boredom," and one that "afflicted monks in particular."⁶⁷ Aldous Huxley's depiction of acedia or, as he refers to it, the "midday demon" is a spiritual one in which he believes "monks were still his favourite victims, but he made many conquests among the laity also."⁶⁸

Is acedia restricted to the church, or those who are involved in an official capacity with a religious institution? It certainly appears to be the case. According to Spacks, acedia was a medieval sin which is a "combination of what we call boredom and what we call sloth, it was understood as a dangerous form of spiritual alienation, a misery of the soul that could, like other sins, be avoided by effort or by grace."⁶⁹ It is odd, then, that

⁶⁴ Edward Peters, "Notes Toward an Archaeology of Boredom," *Social Research* 42 (1975): 497.

⁶⁵ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 20.

⁶⁶ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 49-50.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁸ Aldous Huxley, "Accidie," In *Aldous Huxley Complete Essays: Vol. I, 1920-1925* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 351-352.

⁶⁹ Spacks, *Boredom*, 11.

the people who were most afflicted by acedia were the ones who were likely the most cognisant of the evils of this sin. Why did acedia afflict medieval monks more than others? Healy argues that “something, or everything, about their situation sapped their spiritual energies.”⁷⁰ If Lefebvre is correct with his assertion that medieval monks contemplated death all day, such a repetition of the macabre could have been a cause of this depletion of spiritual energies. Locating the source of the affliction in one’s soul, it would appear as though acedia does not have a place in a secular society. That is, at least not for those who do not put any faith into the idea of acedia as a sin.

Elizabeth Goodstein defines acedia in a very general way as “literally, lacking care or interest”⁷¹ much the same as Raposa’s definition as an affliction that stems from a “lack of care.”⁷² Healy hones this definition to being an affliction that is specifically related to lack of care of one’s “spiritual good.”⁷³ Unlike Raposa, the aforementioned Kuhn, and Norris who essentially believe boredom and acedia to be one and the same, Goodstein goes on to differentiate between acedia and boredom. “Attempts to identify boredom with melancholy or acedia,” writes Goodstein, “thus efface the distinctive modernity of the experience without qualities.”⁷⁴ It is quite evident that Goodstein is of the mind that there are much stronger discontinuities between the two terms than continuities. Despite these disagreements in the boredom literature, it can be said that there is somewhat of a consensus throughout that ‘lack of care’ is a point of continuity between acedia and boredom. One notable difference being that acedia is a sin whereas boredom is not.

⁷⁰ Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 17.

⁷¹ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 35.

⁷² Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 21.

⁷³ Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 17.

⁷⁴ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 398.

If acedia is not related to boredom, is it much more akin to depression? If so, is there a definitive difference between boredom and depression? Throughout the literature on boredom it is Healy in his book *Self, Boredom, and Culture* that arguably offers the most useful distinction between boredom and depression. To Healy, bored individuals do not have any “satisfying goal” whereas the depressed individual “does not believe in one’s ability to *achieve* a desired goal.”⁷⁵ This is an important contribution despite some authors such as Peter Toohey who think a distinction between boredom and depression is a “moot point.”⁷⁶ Richard Winter and Lars Svendsen have both commented on the difference between boredom and depression, with varying degrees of precision. Svendsen is uncertain of the difference when he writes, “my guess is that there is considerable overlap.”⁷⁷ In contrast, Winter is much more certain of the distinction. “Unlike the bored person,” writes Winter, “the depressed person has a very negative view of herself.”⁷⁸ According to Winter, the bored person is someone who has a desire for something but does not know what, whereas the depressed individual has no desire for anything. J.M. Barbalet argues that “depression is thus inwardly directed to the self, boredom more typically outwardly directed to activity, engagements, and environment.”⁷⁹ Barbalet and Winter are much closer to Healy than Svendsen with regards to their respective articulations of the differences between boredom and depression. One definitive distinction between boredom and depression can be found in the work of

⁷⁵ Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 60.

⁷⁶ Peter Toohey, “Some Ancient Notions of Boredom,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 13(1), (1988): 159.

⁷⁷ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 15.

⁷⁸ Winter, *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment*, 78.

⁷⁹ J.M. Barbalet, “Boredom and Social Meaning,” *British Journal of Sociology* 50(4), (December, 1999): 635.

Stendhal who once wrote that “boredom strips away everything, even the courage to kill oneself.”⁸⁰ Conversely, a depressed person would be able to commit suicide.

Three terms are here being considered: boredom, acedia, and depression. The components of this constellation can be found scattered throughout the work of Walter Benjamin; it is just a matter of assembling the appropriate pieces. Benjamin is an important theorist not only for differentiating boredom from acedia, but also for establishing links between acedia and depression,⁸¹ although it is slightly obscured by some of his commentators. For example, in his introduction to the English edition of Walter Benjamin’s text *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, George Steiner conflates boredom with acedia. It is but a minor point in his essay, but it is nevertheless one that is well worth considering here. Steiner writes: “Benjamin shows how it is in its figuration of ‘world-sadness, of *acedia* – that final boredom of the spirit – that baroque thought and art achieve their truest depths.”⁸² Despite Steiner’s conflation of boredom, sadness, and acedia, Benjamin makes no mention of boredom in this particular book, nor does he allude to it. This absence alone does not suggest a difference amongst the terms, but I argue that Benjamin implicitly differentiated between boredom and acedia in his overall body of work. For example, Benjamin’s unfinished magnum opus *The Arcades Project* features a section (Convolute D) called ‘Boredom, Eternal Return’. Despite its size, this small section consisting of original and quoted fragments has been an influential source for contemporary boredom scholarship.⁸³ He makes no mention of acedia throughout this

⁸⁰ Stendhal, *Love*, trans. Gilbert Sale and Suzanne Sale (London: Penguin, 1975), 211.

⁸¹ For more on Benjamin’s complex association with acedia as a form of sadness, see Françoise Meltzer’s “Acedia and Melancholia,” *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 141-163.

⁸² George Steiner, “Introduction,” In Walter Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso Press, 2003), 19.

⁸³ See Andrew Benjamin, “Boredom and Distraction: The Moods of Modernity,” *Walter Benjamin and*

section of his *Arcades Project*.⁸⁴ In another essay, though, Benjamin summarizes acedia quite nicely as follows: “Among medieval theologians, acedia was regarded as the root cause of sadness.”⁸⁵ Sadness is the keyword that ought to be highlighted in this sentence. In addition, it should also be noted that Benjamin does not refer to boredom in this essay. To sum up: when Benjamin refers to boredom, he does not mention acedia. When Benjamin mentions acedia, he does not conflate it with boredom but instead links it with sadness. Much like boredom is separate from acedia in Benjamin’s work, so too are the terms in their definitions. With this in mind, the following hypothesis can be proposed: acedia is not the same as boredom because sadness is not the same as boredom. Sadness is more akin to depression than boredom. Therefore, I claim, following Benjamin, that acedia is a form of melancholy, depression, sadness, whereas boredom is something else entirely, despite Steiner’s conflation of these terms.

Ennui

Keeping with George Steiner, he offers an interesting interpretation of ennui in his essay ‘The Great Ennui’. Steiner argues that “boredom is not an adequate translation” of ennui “nor is *Langeweile* except, perhaps in Schopenhauer’s usage; *la noia* comes much nearer.”⁸⁶ In contrast, Goodstein regards the contemporary usage – that is to say, after boredom was in widespread circulation as a concept denoting an experience of these four terms – ennui, *langeweile*, *la noia*, and boredom – to be the same experience

History (New York: Continuum, 2006), 156-170; Joe Moran, “Benjamin and Boredom,” *Critical Quarterly* 45 (1-2), (July, 2003): 168-181; Peter Osborne, “The Dreambird of Experience: Utopia, Possibility, Boredom,” *Radical Philosophy* 137 (May/June, 2006): 36-44.

⁸⁴ It is, however, mentioned twice on different pages in this book. See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 293; 369.

⁸⁵ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others and eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 391.

⁸⁶ George Steiner, “The Great Ennui,” *In Bluebeard’s Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 9.

described by different languages.⁸⁷ What may be going on here is a lack of recognition between contemporary usages of those terms, and their usage pre-boredom. Steiner does not consider the possibility that these terms could be interchangeable depending on the situation and the speaker/writer who is using them. To Steiner, they are simply different. Where Steiner is consistent with much of the literature is his belief that ennui is special. Steiner locates the birth of widespread ennui in the following passage: “It is to the years after Waterloo that we must look for the roots of “the great *ennui*,” which as early as 1819, Schopenhauer defined as the corrosive illness of the new age.”⁸⁸ Steiner continues, writing, “The city itself, once festive with the tocsin of revolution had become a prison.”⁸⁹ The theme of the city will prove to be a significant one.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, in this ennui Steiner postulates that there is a “vague waiting – but for what?”⁹¹ With this, we can see the resemblance between Steiner’s ‘ennui’ and Benjamin’s ‘boredom’. Benjamin notes in his *Arcades Project* that “[w]e are bored when we don’t know what we are waiting for. That we do know, or think we know is nearly always the expression of our superficiality or inattention.”⁹² Here we can see that Benjamin is using waiting in a very specific way. Andrew Benjamin describes it as “awaiting without an object.”⁹³ Benjamin’s depiction of boredom is one where waiting is instrumental to the experience.

⁸⁷ For example, the title of Alberto Moravia’s book was translated into English as *Boredom* from the original Italian title *La Noia*.

⁸⁸ Steiner, “The Great Ennui,” 16.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁰ Chapter 3 of this dissertation deals specifically with the urban in general and, in parts, the city in particular.

⁹¹ Steiner, “The Great Ennui,” 10.

⁹² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 105. Thomas C. Oden ‘thinks he knows’ the answer, which is that such waiting is one’s inability to recognize the presence of God. He writes: “Like the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, we wait for something that is constantly meeting us. The one we wait for visits us every day, but we do not recognize him, since we cannot believe he could be so near.” Thomas C. Oden, “The Structure of Boredom,” In *The Structure of Awareness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 188.

⁹³ Andrew Benjamin, “Boredom and Distraction: the Moods of Modernity,” *Walter Benjamin and History* (London: Continuum, 2006), 168.

This waiting is for nothing in particular. Rather, one waits for the unknown. The longing for a nameless, faceless, shapeless thing in Benjamin's work is similar to the "vague waiting" Steiner refers to as 'ennui'. This similarity is understandable since Benjamin's remark about boredom is derived from his intense and lengthy study of the Paris Arcades and the word 'ennui' stems from the French language.

Seán Desmond Healy locates the formation of the French word 'ennui' in the thirteenth century.⁹⁴ The connection between boredom and ennui is usually found in the work of Blaise Pascal. Lars Svendsen summarizes the boredom theorized by Pascal as follows: "For Pascal, man is doomed to boredom without God."⁹⁵ It is worth noting that there is no social element to boredom for Pascal. It is "an essential characteristic of man as such."⁹⁶ Elizabeth Goodstein astutely notes that Pascal's "interpretation assimilated ennui to the sin of acedia."⁹⁷ In contrast, Reinhard Kuhn makes the claim that "despite the many points they do have in common, there is an abyss that separates the ennui of which Pascal writes and the acedia of the Middle Ages."⁹⁸ In fact, in Kuhn's opinion, there is an abyss between ennui and all the other forms of boredom. Kuhn acknowledges ennui to indeed be a form of boredom, which should be differentiated from the other much more trivial forms. Simply put, in Kuhn's view ennui is an important phenomenon for academic scholarship and the others are not. It is, however, important for Kuhn to at least mention what he believes to be lesser, insignificant forms of boredom. He makes

⁹⁴ Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 18.

⁹⁵ Svendsen labels Pascal as "the most prominent early theoretician of boredom." *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 52.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁷ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 111.

⁹⁸ Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 113.

this comparison early in his book and once this comparison has been made the other boredom is no longer considered.

In his influential book *The Demon of Noontide*, Kuhn devotes slightly less than 400 pages for analyzing ennui, or what he calls a ‘particular form of boredom’.⁹⁹ Ennui is contrasted with four other “dissimilar types of boredom” and, although he privileges ennui, Kuhn concedes that it cannot be “completely divorced” from the others. Kuhn labels these four types as (1) *désœuvrement*, (2) psychosomatic boredom, (3) monotony, and (4) *anomie*.¹⁰⁰ Though being able to focus on only one particular type is a testament to the depth of boredom, Kuhn’s decision to avoid analyzing its breadth is problematic. Goodstein writes of Kuhn that he has the “assumption that ‘ennui’ is an ahistorical feature of the human condition.”¹⁰¹ Since Kuhn essentially puts ‘ennui’ hierarchically above what he terms ‘ordinary’ forms of boredom, he perhaps cannot see them as having a deeper relationship than merely sharing the general title of boredom. This privileging of ennui in Kuhn’s study is effectively clouding the other forms of boredom.

Following Kuhn, Verna Gehring writes: “Ennui, by contrast, covers more territory than does boredom.”¹⁰² Gehring is referring to the importance and mysterious nature of ennui in contrast to the dull and banal nature of boredom.¹⁰³ With this sexiness attributed to it, it is no surprise that ennui, according to Spacks, is considered to be boredom’s

⁹⁹ It is interesting to note that above it was shown that Aldous Huxley referred to ‘acedia’ as a midday demon and Reinhard Kuhn refers to ‘ennui’ as the demon of noontide. Both authors appear to be referring to the same experience while employing different concepts for it.

¹⁰⁰ Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 45.

¹⁰² Verna V. Gehring. “Tedium Vitae: or, My Life as a ‘Net Serf’,” *Ratio*, 10(2), (September, 1997): 127.

¹⁰³ With regards to banality and the historical era of late capitalism, Eugénie Shinkle writes: “Banality is a problem of late capitalism, a creation of macroeconomics, and an effect of material culture. Closely bound up with notions of boredom and *ennui*, the banal is a kind of shorthand for those routines and value systems of high capitalism that are as annoying and trivial as they are obligatory.” “Boredom, repetition, inertia: contemporary photography and the aesthetics of the banal,” *Mosaic*, 37(4), (December, 2004): 167.

“more dignified cousin.”¹⁰⁴ Spacks here seems to imply that the two words are related, yet are not so close in definition. Spacks offers a distinction between the two when she writes: “Boredom was not (*is not*) the same as ennui, more closely related to acedia. Ennui implies a judgment of the universe; boredom, a response to the immediate. Ennui belongs to those with a sense of sublime potential, those who feel themselves superior to their environment.”¹⁰⁵ Spacks does not consider the possibility that ennui is a form of boredom, or vice versa, in the sense that those who are bored could have a ‘sense of sublime potential’ or ‘feel superior to their environment’. This is a problematic feature in her book, as she often uses the two terms interchangeably despite her claim that they are different.

Michael Raposa, on the other hand, does make the link between the two terms. To Raposa, ennui is “boredom colored by melancholy.”¹⁰⁶ Much the same as Kuhn, Raposa believes that ennui has a certain prestige about it where the afflicted person “may be admired rather than pitied.”¹⁰⁷ Raposa goes on to say that people who have ennui can be seen as superior to their surroundings. This, of course, could only work if others bought into this pose. That is, a beggar on the street would be hard pressed to convince others that his boredom is a sign of his superiority to his environment. Boredom alone is not enough of a sign. There must be other factors such as affluence that must already be present in order for boredom to be a sign of one’s superiority to one’s surroundings. Boredom as pose can be contrasted with boredom as reality. Posing as bored, as some people would do, entails pretending to be bored, as opposed to genuinely experiencing it.

¹⁰⁴ Spacks, *Boredom*, xi.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

It may actually be exciting for certain posers to elevate themselves above the social situation at hand. This is understandable when boredom is believed to be a status symbol. If being bored demonstrates one's significant social status, it would follow that some people would fake their boredom in order to appear as being among the elite.

Klapp takes a cue from Kuhn in one respect by defining ennui as an experience that can be "distinguished from ordinary boredom by being deeper, chronic, a feeling of meaninglessness or spiritual anguish."¹⁰⁸ As was mentioned above, Kuhn's study focuses on one form of boredom called ennui which he contrasts with the "great many forms of boredom" because he believes they are "hardly worth serious study."¹⁰⁹ But why is it that ennui seems to be a much more profound boredom than the other forms of boredom? Goodstein claims that "Kuhn abstracted ennui from its worldly conditions."¹¹⁰

Separating the experience from its worldly conditions is problematic for my particular analysis of boredom. Whereas Goodstein contends that Kuhn assumes "ennui is an ahistorical feature of the human condition,"¹¹¹ my analysis is similar to Goodstein's own work, which considers boredom as an historically specific phenomenon. This is *the* major rift in the literature on boredom. Essentially, any study of boredom proceeds from one of two assumptions: either boredom is a historically specific phenomenon or it is timeless and ahistorical. While Bertrand Russell may be the exception, if boredom is linked to particular historical circumstances, it is linked to the specific material conditions of the historical era of modernity.

¹⁰⁸ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 24-25.

¹⁰⁹ Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 86.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Modernity in General: Industrialization

In his book *Self, Boredom, and Culture*, Seán Desmond Healy lists such intellectual luminaries as St. Gregory the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Freud, and Heidegger as thinkers who could not address one of boredom's

most obvious features, its immensely increased prevalence in the last several hundred years in the West. All were firmly individualistic and psychological in their approach, rather as if one were to attribute the rising number of deaths on the roads in the last half century to behavioral idiosyncrasies rather than to the larger number of faster cars on a greatly extended network of roads during that period of time.¹¹²

It is easy to see how some of these intellectuals were unable to adequately articulate boredom when one considers that it did not exist and was thus impossible. There are numerous anachronistic readings of boredom where the authors extract, although most likely unknowingly, the historical specificity. Such a view inevitably leads to an ahistorical reading of boredom, as opposed to seeing boredom as tied to modernity.

“Modern boredom,” writes Elizabeth Goodstein, “undeniably resembles, echoes, and resonates with older form of malaise – melancholy, acedia, horror loci, taedium vitae – stretching back to antiquity. However, it can be identified with none of them.”¹¹³ It is hoped that the preceding section has cast a shadow of doubt on the link between boredom and its supposed pre-modern pre-cursors by showing the lack of consensus amongst boredom scholars regarding boredom and history.

If boredom cannot be identified with older forms of malaise, why is it so often identified with them? One final excursion through a position counter to Goodstein's is perhaps needed here, that of Peter Toohey. Toohey, like Brodsky and Winter, insists that boredom has been around for ages. Toohey claims it has survived “through fifteen

¹¹² Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 10-11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

hundred years of Western culture” and he chalks the lack of definition during its long history up to not having the same importance for “ancients as it does for moderns.”¹¹⁴

What Toohey is doing here is claiming a lack of care for boredom amongst the ancients. He has effectively congealed boredom with the lack of care that is the vital characteristic of *acedia*. In making this claim, Toohey does not acknowledge the enormous changes that have occurred with dawning of modernity. This section will demonstrate that boredom is a modern phenomenon because the necessary conditions to experience boredom with regards to space and time are only available in modernity. As such, there are structural differences in society today from that of the Middle Ages that make a different experience of everyday life inevitable.

The following hypothesis arises: Modern life is different than pre-modern life. So why does boredom emerge in modernity? What is it about an industrialized world that creates the material conditions for such an experience? According to Leslie Paul Thiele, with the processes of modernization it seems “a deep boredom with life seems the inevitable and most threatening consequence of becoming modern.”¹¹⁵ William McDonald helps expand on this thought:

Boredom is not a universal feature of human life, but arises as a distinctive malady of modernity in epidemic proportions. The epidemic is accompanied by a burgeoning of discourse about boredom in the nineteenth century, which both mirrors the epidemic and helps to propagate it. The modern concept of boredom is distinct from the medieval concept of *acedia* in belonging to a different discourse, which is produced by different institutions; it is conceived as a psychological malady, a social malaise, or an aesthetic challenge, rather than as a sin; its antidotes are conceived as either distraction by means of “busyness” or by craving “the interesting,” or as transfiguration of experience through intensification of the imagination, rather than as spiritual discipline, patient

¹¹⁴ Toohey, “Some Ancient Notions of Boredom,” 151.

¹¹⁵ Leslie Paul Thiele, “Postmodernity and the Routinization of Novelty: Heidegger on Boredom and Technology,” *Polity*, 29(4), (1997): 494.

devotion or penance; and it is conceived in purely human secular terms, rather than in religious.¹¹⁶

Continuing in this vein, boredom's "comparatively brief linguistic history," writes Spacks, "suggests that it is by no means universal."¹¹⁷ Spacks notes how "the first citation of the noun boredom belongs to 1864."¹¹⁸ While locating the initial English usage of the French word 'ennui' in the late 17th century, Spacks goes on to say, "If people felt bored before the late eighteenth century, they didn't know it."¹¹⁹ With the industrialized world, both the language and the experience emerge.

Kevin Aho gives a wonderfully succinct summary of boredom as "a mood born in the urban industrial centers of Western Europe and America and reaching a state of ubiquity in the technological age."¹²⁰ Aho's position is the opposite of Bertrand Russell's, especially with regards to the ubiquity of boredom. Instead of declining in the machine/technological age as Russell claimed, boredom flourishes. Michael Hanby, writing in a similar vein to Aho, offers a lengthier explanation that helps to recapitulate the general sentiment of the previous section:

The advent of this concept of boredom coincides, tellingly, with the rise of bourgeois society and the triumph of industrialization. There is no etymological record of the word or the concept prior to the eighteenth century. Boredom

¹¹⁶ William McDonald, "Kierkegaard's Demonic Boredom," In *Essays on Boredom and Modernity*, eds. Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani (New York: Rodopi, 2009), 61.

¹¹⁷ Spacks, *Boredom*, 6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 14. It is certainly possible that pre-modern people simply did not have the language to articulate what they were experiencing. After all, how can one say they are bored when this word does not exist? This is, essentially, what Spacks sets out to prove in the early part of her book by analyzing various novels, conduct books, and personal letters that seem to be referring to boredom, but the writers cannot exactly articulate it, and some even do not want to articulate it, because of the negative connotations associated with experiencing time that is empty. Spacks writes: "Eighteenth-century thinkers associate boredom unambiguously with moral failure. Its remedy involves mental, moral, or spiritual discipline. Nineteenth century commentators connect it with class arrogance, with inadequate responsiveness to others, sometimes with capitalistic false value. They too frequently imply that it can be remedied by self-discipline." Ibid., 268.

¹²⁰ Kevin Aho, "Simmel on Acceleration, Boredom, and Extreme Aesthesia," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 37(4), (2007): 447.

differs in important ways from such antecedents as *ennui* or *acedia*. The diagnosis of these maladies traditionally contained within them a moral judgment of the subject, whose melancholy was understood as a moral and spiritual affront to a true and meaningful order of things. Boredom, by contrast, names a twofold failure of an altogether different kind: a failure of the world to be compelling to a subject ostensibly entitled to such an expectation *and* a failure or incapacity on the part of the subject to be compelled.¹²¹

It is clear that Hanby and Aho both link boredom to modernity by emphasizing, if not pinpointing an explicit catalyst, its chief driving force: industrialization.

But what exactly is it about industrialization that creates the conditions for an experience such as boredom? With industrialization, space and time are experienced in new ways. The experience of time and space of pre-modern times differs from the temporal and spatial experience(s) of today. Bringing Lefebvre back into the picture, for him, these experiences can only be historically specific ones. What is difficult to pinpoint, however, is the initial crack that leads to the proliferation. In his book *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre identifies one such crack that emerged roughly six hundred years ago. He writes: “Beginning in the sixteenth century, the accumulation process exploded the framework of small medieval communities, towns and cities, fiefdoms and principalities.”¹²² The process of accumulation, then, altered the spatial and temporal experiences of the time. This is the beginning of the end of medieval society and the onset of modernity. Lefebvre explains that,

[t]here is no doubt that medieval society – that is, the feudal mode of production, with its variants and local peculiarities – created its own space. Medieval space built upon the space constituted in the preceding period, and preserved that space as a substrate and prop for its symbols; it survives in an analogous fashion itself today. Manors, monasteries, cathedrals – these were the strong points anchoring the network of lanes and main roads to a landscape transformed by peasant

¹²¹ Michael Hanby, “The Culture of Death, the Ontology of Boredom, and the Resistance of Joy,” *Communio* 31 (Summer, 2004), 184.

¹²² PS, 280.

communities. This space was the take-off point for Western European capital accumulation, the original source and cradle of which were the towns.

Each era has its own spatial configurations that are both a departure from the old spatial configurations while also building on them. Lefebvre portrays a transition from the space of feudalism (medieval) to the space of capitalism (modern):

Capitalism and neocapitalism have produced *abstract space*, which includes the 'world of commodities', its 'logic' and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state. This space is founded on the vast network of banks, business centres and major productive entities, as also on motorways, airports and information lattices. Within this space the town – once the forcing-house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and centre of historical space – has been disintegrated.¹²³

This disintegration can in small part be attributed to what Joe Moran calls "capitalism's endless search for novelty and innovation."¹²⁴ For Lefebvre, this lust for novelty is part of the ideology of modernity. Writing at the beginning of the 1980s, Lefebvre casts a glance backwards at the true meaning of modernity. "[M]odernity as an ideology," writes Lefebvre, "now appears as an episode in the development and realization of the capitalist mode of production."¹²⁵

Notwithstanding the endless quest for innovation that is a hallmark of modernity, there are pre-modern practices that have been preserved, or, at the very least, have an element of continuity between the past and the present. Harvie Ferguson, in his book

¹²³ Ibid., 53. (my italics)

¹²⁴ Moran, "Benjamin and Boredom," 179.

¹²⁵ CEL 3, 50. In the preface to the first volume of Lefebvre's *Critique*, Michel Trebitsch argues that this search for perpetual newness is an apt definition of modernity itself. "Modernity," writes Trebitsch, "is the movements towards the new, the deployment of technology and rationality (which Lefebvre calls 'modernism'), but it is also the absence of any real transformation of social relations, and leads from the human towards the inhuman, towards barbarity." The key here for Trebitsch is the lack of newness with the new. While there are indeed new items for consumption, they are predominantly variations on older themes, with very little in the way of innovation. For Lefebvre, however, there is indeed something new with the modern world. He writes: "Surely what is new and genuinely 'modern' is the contradiction between individual loneliness and the bringing-together of crowds or masses in gigantic cities, in massive business companies, in vast offices, in armies, in political parties." IM, 189.

Self-Identity and Everyday Life, writes that modernity is a “radical change” from pre-modern times that nevertheless retains certain pre-modern ways of life albeit coloured and fashioned by the modern.

Modernity is a large scale, comprehensive transformation in the conditions of people’s lives; it is, equally, a transformation in their world view, recreations and personal relations. It also transforms everything in the past that seems, in some form, to have persisted into the present. Everything that appears still to be pre-modern, including older religious perspectives, small communities and traditionalism of many sorts, is irresistibly and fundamentally altered in becoming part of modern society. They appear as other possible experiences of life, rather than, simply, particular ways of life. Modernity, in other words, is cunningly inclusive and does not readily allow people to ‘opt out’ of its radical break with the past. Every apparent survival of the pre-modern, along with the newly created alternative mode of life, is assimilated to another version of its own essential form and becomes just another possible experience.¹²⁶

Despite the radical change that took place with the onset of modernity, it is not simple to identify the exact time modernity came into being, nor is it simple to pinpoint the space in which boredom was first experienced. In fact, Lars Svendsen argues that “it is of course impossible to determine precisely *when* boredom arose.”¹²⁷

How does one go about giving a rough approximation of the emergence of boredom? A vital clue can be found amongst library shelves, or, as Walter Benjamin calls it, “the mild boredom of order”¹²⁸ that are library shelves. A brief excursion through the reference section of any well stocked library reveals hidden truths about the

¹²⁶ Ferguson, *Self-Identity and Everyday Life*, 66.

¹²⁷ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 11.

¹²⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting,” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 59. Similarly, Lefebvre has written of ‘official’ classification as “covering all things ‘as they are’ – arranged and classified on official shelves – with the dust of boredom.” EX, 50-51. In addition to libraries and shelves, it has been said that “[a]rchives embody the mystique of boredom [...] Boredom is a front cover preserving archives from intruders looking for easy excitement: you have to fight your way in a flattening environment, which puts the context above the individual value.” subREAL, “Politics of Cultural Heritage,” *The Archive* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 115.

evolution of society through the emergence of new words. For example, Goodstein located the term in the Oxford English Dictionary.

If we may trust the Oxford English Dictionary, boredom was literally non-existent until the late eighteenth century – that is, it came into being as Enlightenment was giving way to Industrial Revolution. While its continental cousins “ennui” and “Langeweile” are older, they were not used synonymously, that is, in the modern sense that combines an existential and a temporal connotation, until about the same time. This linguistic convergence reflects experiential transformations that were transnational in nature, for modernization literally altered the quality of human being in time. In the course of the nineteenth century, even as the temporal rhythms of everyday life were being revolutionized by technological and economic developments, a new, secular interpretation of human temporality was gaining ground.¹²⁹

To add to this, it is interesting to note that Roland Barthes once described the nineteenth century as “the century of Boredom.”¹³⁰ Walter Benjamin is even more precise in his assessment locating its explosion in the middle of the century when he states that “boredom began to be experienced in epidemic proportions during the 1840s.”¹³¹ It is fairly safe to assume that Benjamin was referring to France with this assertion since it comes from his study of the Paris arcades. What happened in Paris in the 1840s for this to occur? According to Michel Carmona, order imposed by the state was the root cause. He writes: “The institutions were stable – too stable. The Soult-Guizot government had been in place since October 1840; it suited the king, and no one could see how a majority could be found to topple it. But for this very reason France had grown bored.”¹³² Goodstein also argues that “modern boredom, which masquerades as a universal feature of the human condition, is a democratized form of the disaffection that plagued the

¹²⁹ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 3.

¹³⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 239.

¹³¹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 108.

¹³² Michel Carmona, *Haussmann: His Life and Times, and the Making of Modern Paris*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 46.

nineteenth-century outsiders, ineffectual protestors against an order ineluctably on the rise.”¹³³ Is order the root cause of boredom? No, as was discussed above, there was a cosmological order in pre-modern times. Does order have something to do with boredom? Yes, but it is only part of a constellation of factors. It would be much more accurate to speak of bureaucratic order, something unique to modernity, as opposed to speaking of order in general.

What are some of the other factors that make up the constellation of boredom? In the introductory section of her book, Spacks offers the following four hypotheses as the possible causes for the proliferation of boredom as a mass phenomenon in modernity:

1. Emergence of leisure
2. Decline of orthodox Christianity
3. Newly elaborated notion of individual rights
4. Concomitant increase in personal sense of entitlement¹³⁴

These four possible causes of boredom, which are mentioned in the first chapter of Spacks’s book, are unfortunately not expanded upon throughout the text. Instead, they are left to linger throughout the course of the book with seldom opportunities for connections to some of the literary material. It is perhaps the lack of confidence in her assertions that lead to the ambiguous use of these four explanations. What Spacks is confident about, however, is that “boredom appears everywhere in the early twentieth century.”¹³⁵ So, while, according to Barthes, the nineteenth century was the ‘century of boredom’, the twentieth century brought more of the same. I argue that this continuity is an ideological quest for discontinuity. That is, the common thread of boredom

¹³³ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 100.

¹³⁴ Spacks, *Boredom*, 21-23. For an analysis of the third point in Spacks’s list, which I interpret as ‘individualism’, see Michael C. Hoover, “Extreme Individualism, False Subjectivity and Boredom,” *Virginia Journal of Sociology* 2(1), (1986): 33-51.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

(continuity) shared between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century is a result of modernity's pursuit of the new (discontinuity).

To see this continuity and discontinuity, it would be beneficial to examine the ever-shifting contours of modernity. This is a difficult yet necessary endeavour in order to find one's way through what Lefebvre calls "the labyrinthine complexities of the modern world."¹³⁶ Lefebvre's book *Introduction to Modernity*, though itself something of a labyrinth, offers the following description of modernity:

Modernity is best characterized not as an already established 'structure', nor as something which clearly has the capacity to become structured and coherent, but rather as a fruitless attempt to achieve structure and coherence. Everything leads us to the conclusion that structures are being 'destructured' even before they have gained a coherent internal stability. They are then integrated within new systems which themselves are already threatened by contradictions and negativity. Everything leads us to the conclusion that it is impossible to represent the 'world' as having a realizable structure and a possible stability.¹³⁷

Such instability recalls a famous phrase from Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* that Marshall Berman adopted for the title of his influential book on modernity *All that is Solid Melts Into Air*.¹³⁸ This phrase is deceptively simple in its brevity, yet certainly complex. In an effort to convey its complexity, Berman begins his book with the following definition of modernity: "There is a mode of vital experience – experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils – that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience

¹³⁶ CEL 2, 2.

¹³⁷ IM, 187-188.

¹³⁸ Although the first part of the passage is usually what is remembered, the whole passage goes as follows: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 21.

modernity.”¹³⁹ Building on this, on the next page, Berman offers an extraordinarily rich description of modern experience in general which is worth quoting in full:

The maelstrom of modern life has been fed from many sources: great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place within it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generates new forms of corporate power and class struggle; immense demographic upheavals severing millions of people from their habitats, hurtling them across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; systems of mass communication, dynamic in their development, enveloping and binding together the most diverse people and societies; increasingly powerful nation states, bureaucratically structured and operated, constantly striving to expand their powers; mass social movements of people and peoples, challenging their political and economic rulers, striving to gain some control in their lives; finally, bearing and driving these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market. In the twentieth-century, the social processes that bring this maelstrom into being, and keep it in a state of perpetual becoming, have come to be called “modernization.”¹⁴⁰

Throughout this sprawling description of the ‘perpetual becoming’ of modern times Berman makes no mention of boredom. So what does Berman’s above passage have to do with boredom? Admittedly, it would appear as though Berman’s description of the processes of modernization leave little room for boredom. After all, to use Berman’s term, such a ‘maelstrom’ of expansion, change, and fluidity would seem to produce excitement and interest at best, and alarm and horror at worst.

Shortly after Berman wrote the above description of the process of modernization, Orrin E. Klapp, in his 1986 book, offers a somewhat tentative assertion: “I think there is reason at least to suspect that boredom is associated with modernity.”¹⁴¹ If one follows

¹³⁹ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 15. Although not offering the same expansive description as Berman does here, ‘maelstrom’, at least in the English translation, is precisely the word Lefebvre employed for his assessment of modern times, as was noted in the introductory chapter to this dissertation.

¹⁴⁰ Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, 16.

¹⁴¹ Klapp. *Overload and Boredom*, 32.

the theologian Michael Raposa, boredom snugly “sits on a conceptual map somewhere between interest and despair.”¹⁴² Berman’s description, it would seem, offers a binary of experiences that roughly approximates to interest and despair, leaving out the third term of boredom. It should come as no surprise that Berman does not take up the problem of boredom in his otherwise thorough engagement with modernity, as most people, scholars and laymen alike, fail to acknowledge boredom as an important issue. This exclusion is only odd if one takes into account Elizabeth Goodstein’s claim that “the problems of theorizing boredom are the same problems of theorizing modern experience more generally.”¹⁴³

Goodstein claims that the proliferation of boredom amongst lower classes during the 19th century has more to do with the increase in mass entertainments than the increase in factory labour.¹⁴⁴ I differ slightly from her on this point. The question must be asked: What about the factory? Recall Lefebvre’s articulation of the ‘double process’ of industrialization and urbanization mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. This double process makes it difficult to claim that boredom has much greater links to mass entertainments than the factory. This is but a minor point of contention I have with Goodstein’s work, but it is an important one all the same. Leisure is certainly a feature of modern society that is absolutely vital for the experience of boredom. I do not contest that point at all. Following Lefebvre, however, I argue that the two processes are

¹⁴² Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 34.

¹⁴³ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 407.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 182. For an early study of the factory and its relationship to boredom, see S. Wyatt and J.N. Langdon, *Fatigue and Boredom in Repetitive Work* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1937). Aside from the research findings, what is so intriguing about Wyatt and Langdon’s study is that it was commissioned by the British government. Boredom, then was an issue that was important enough to be worthy of a commissioned study by the British government. The British are not alone in this respect. For a study of boredom commissioned by the American government, see Richard I. Thackray, “Boredom and Monotony as a Consequence of Automation: a Consideration of Evidence Relating Boredom and Monotony to Stress,” (Oklahoma City, OK: U.S. Department of Transportation, 1980).

interlinked and cannot be easily separated. I much prefer to think of the factory and the streets in a dialectical way. After all, are not the factory workers the same people who are taking part in the mass entertainments?

As for workers and industrialization, there are two interrelated examples that ought to be highlighted as particularly relevant for the extension of boredom in the twentieth century: Taylorism and Fordism. It is not too difficult to link the intensification of boredom with the increased specialization that came with the advents of Taylorism and Fordism. Stanley Aronowitz explains that “Taylorism and its variant, Fordism, have imposed themselves universally in the workplace of advanced industrial societies.”¹⁴⁵ But what are Taylorism and Fordism? Whereas Taylorism can be located in the texts of its inventor, the industrial psychologist Frederick W. Taylor, – in particular *The Principles of Scientific Management* – Fordism is in many ways the practical application of Taylorism with the aid of technological innovations. Where they differ is that Henri Ford, the iconic auto maker whom Fordism is attributed, employed an assembly line for his efficient management and he also recognized that “mass production meant mass consumption.”¹⁴⁶

Taylorism

Jeff Ferrell describes the ‘innovations’ of Taylor and Ford as merely “calibrating their instruments of organized boredom.”¹⁴⁷ Following Ferrell’s suggestion, it is important to ask: How exactly did Taylor and Ford ‘calibrate their instruments of organized boredom’? As Fordism sprang from the innovations first established with

¹⁴⁵ Stanley Aronowitz, “The Production of Scientific Knowledge: Science, Ideology, and Marxism,” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 521.

¹⁴⁶ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 125-126.

¹⁴⁷ Jeff Ferrell, “Boredom, Crime and Criminology,” *Theoretical Criminology* 8(3), (2004): 292

Taylorism, it would be beneficial to further define the latter term first. Lefebvre offers a useful explanation of Taylorism as follows:

Taylorism, one of the first ‘scientific’ approaches to productivity, reduced the body as a whole to a small number of motions subjected to strictly controlled linear determinations. A division of labour so extreme, whereby specialization extends to individual gestures, has undoubtedly had as much influence as linguistic discourse on the breaking-down of the body into a mere collection of unconnected parts.¹⁴⁸

Lefebvre’s definition is confirmed by Taylor himself who argued that “in the past the man has been first; in the future the system must be first.”¹⁴⁹ Taylor was not simply concerned with maximizing efficiency in the factory, he held a much broader vision of maximizing efficiency in every aspect of everyday life. He writes: “the great loss which the whole country is suffering through inefficiency in almost all of our daily acts.” He then goes on to say, “[i]t is hoped, however, that it will be clear to other readers that the same principles can be applied with equal force to all social activities.”¹⁵⁰ Taylor’s influence, then, could potentially extend to anyone and everything in modernity.

In an article from 1974, Richard Schonberger concludes his analysis of the intertwinement of boredom and Taylorism by exclaiming: “Taylorism is unlikely to die in the foreseeable future.”¹⁵¹ This can be contrasted with Klaus Ronneberger’s claim that “during the 1970s [...] Taylorism had exhausted itself.”¹⁵² The increase in automation that has taken place in the factory, office, street, department store, home, and so on, may seem as though Taylorism has waned in that machines have replaced the repetitive work

¹⁴⁸ PS, 204.

¹⁴⁹ Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), 7.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵¹ Richard J. Schonberger, “Taylorism Up-To-Date: The Inevitability of Worker Boredom,” *Business and Society* (Spring, 1974), 17.

¹⁵² Klaus Ronneberger, “Henri Lefebvre and Urban Everyday Life: In Search of the Possible,” *Space, Difference, Everyday Life; Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 139.

of the human, but I argue the opposite is true. While I fully acknowledge the increase in automation by machines, I believe that Taylorism has not waned, it has become much closer to being fulfilled.¹⁵³ The standardized and repetitive movements advocated by the ideology of Taylorism are ideally suited to the technological precision of machines. It is everywhere, so it does not readily stand out against a background of otherness, and thus appears nowhere despite its pervasiveness amongst myriad occupations.

Ben Highmore claims “the experience of homogenized time is unevenly distributed across social differences: the boredom of factory work is differentiated from the boredom of the computer operators, which is differentiated from the boredom of the domestic worker, and so.”¹⁵⁴ But what are the differences? There are both continuities and discontinuities amongst the activities required with each vocation. Some workers have more variation in their workday while others, such as those on an assembly line, face countless hours of sameness. Whereas Highmore argues the varying degrees of boredom at work, Jean Baudrillard conversely argues that “[t]he fatigue of the citizen of post-industrial society is not far removed from the ‘go-slow’ or ‘slowdown’ of factory workers, or the schoolchild’s ‘boredom’.”¹⁵⁵ Regardless of the similarity or difference in

¹⁵³ I believe the contemporary incarnation of Taylorism is best expressed by George Ritzer’s term ‘McDonaldization’. See George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* 6, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011. For an example that explicitly links boredom and McDonaldization, see Joanne Finkelstein. “The Taste of Boredom: McDonaldization and Australian Fast Food Culture,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 47(2), (October, 2003): 187-200.

¹⁵⁴ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 8.

¹⁵⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths & Structures*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Sage, 1998), 153. 182-183. Baudrillard touches on an important point; boredom is not restricted to the factory, or blue collar work, but can also be felt in other areas of work, such as at an office, also known as white collar work. The boredom of the cubicle/office space has been referred to as ‘boreout’, which is a play on the standard complaint of being ‘burnt out’. For more on this concept, see Philippe Rothlin and Peter R. Werder, *Boreout!: Overcoming Workplace Demotivation* (London: Kogan Page, 2008). David Foster Wallace tackles the themes of boredom and white collar work in his unfinished novel *The Pale King*. In this fictional world, boredom is said to be “the key to modern life,” which Wallace portrays as being dominated by crushing and ruthless bureaucracy. To succeed in this life requires an office worker to, so to

boredom being experienced amongst different occupations, the majority of these spaces and practices are specific to modernity and the majority of which, even if they are ‘flexible’, include elements that are consistent with Taylor’s vision. So, if Taylorism has waned, it is only through its proliferation and realization. Schonberger argues that while the worker may not like Taylorism, consumers love it: “The craftsman, carefully fashioning and fitting gun parts or automobile parts together, was replaced by the bored but well-paid assembly-line cog. Yes, he hates his job. But consumers adore his output: low-cost, reliable guns and bullets, autos and electric knives, power mowers and telephones, on and on, *ad infinitum*.”¹⁵⁶ The same workers who dislike their monotonous employment most likely appreciate the low-cost of products when their shift ends and they switch to consumers instead of producers.

Fordism

As for Fordism, its hallmark is the assembly line. Walter Benjamin argues that “boredom in the production process arises as the process accelerates (through machinery).”¹⁵⁷ Following Benjamin, it would seem as though the incorporation of the assembly line into the production process would inevitably lead to boredom. Perhaps it is no coincidence, then, that the birth of Fordism has been linked to boredom. One commentator notes that “realizing that boredom and monotony were major causes of employee concern, [Henry] Ford simply paid his workforce more for their time.”¹⁵⁸

Similarly, Richard Sennett argues that “Henry Ford believed worry about the quality of

speak, “breath without air.” If one cannot be bored, then the sky is the limit. David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2011), 437-438.

¹⁵⁶ Schonberger, “Taylorism Up-To-Date,” 12.

¹⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2006), 157.

¹⁵⁸ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 161.

work life ‘mere moonshine’; five dollars a day was a handsome enough reward for boredom.”¹⁵⁹ With this, monotonous work is tolerated if the pay rate is substantial enough.

Fordism is not restricted to the Ford Motor Company, but is the general logic behind the use of assembly lines for manufacturing.¹⁶⁰ An example of the boredom of Fordism can be found in the autobiographical book *Rivthead*. Here, its author, Ben Hamper, recalls his ambivalent, lifelong relationship with the General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan. In many ways, these memoirs are a collection of tales on the topic of waiting. Waiting for his father to come home from work; waiting for GM to call him to come back to work after being laid off; waiting for his shift to end, etc. In one particularly vivid account, Hamper describes his first experience with automobile manufacturing when he visited GM for ‘family day’. On this particular day, he – a young boy at the time – and his mother went to visit his father working on the assembly line. After walking through row after row of sameness, they eventually come upon his father at his workstation. While Hamper wrote about this as an adult, long after his visit as a child, it made a substantial impression on him that lasted for decades. He describes the visit:

We stood there for forty minutes or so, a miniature lifetime, and the pattern never changed. Car, windshield. Car, windshield. Drudgery piled atop drudgery. Cigarette to cigarette. Decades rolling through the rafters, bones turning to dust, stubborn clocks gagging down flesh, another windshield, another cigarette, wars blinking on and off, thunderstorms muttering the alphabet, crows on power lines asleep or dead, that mechanical octopus squirming against nothing, nothing, NOTHINGNESS. I wanted to shout at my father “Do something else!” Do

¹⁵⁹ Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: the Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1998), 39.

¹⁶⁰ For a study of the relationship between boredom and assembly lines, especially as it relates to career progression and age, see Ross Stagner, “Boredom on the Assembly Line: Age and Personality Variables,” *Industrial Gerontology* 2(1), (1975): 23-44.

something else or come home with us or flee to the nearest watering hole. DO SOMETHING ELSE! Car, windshield. Car, windshield. Christ, no.¹⁶¹

This description is reminiscent of a passage from Marx's *Capital Volume 1* where Marx likens the factory experience to the 'torture of Sisyphus' of being condemned to carry out the same task ad infinitum without ever accomplishing one's goals.

Factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost; at the same time, it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and in intellectual activity. Even the lightening of the labour becomes an instrument of torture, since the machine does not free the worker from the work, but rather deprives the work itself of all content.¹⁶²

Here, Marx points to the industrial process as causing one's work to become empty, or without 'content', or as Ben Hamper puts it, 'nothingness'. It is worth recalling Marx's phrase mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation of boredom as the 'longing for content'. Incredibly, Marx wrote these words roughly one century before young Ben Hamper went into his father's factory.

After all of the difficulty with accepting the nature of working on an assembly line, Hamper still followed in his father's footsteps.¹⁶³ In Hamper's own experience working on the assembly line at GM he became all the more aware of the difficulties in performing the same task(s) over and over again. He argues that such a position presents the worker with "the age old plight that came to haunt every screw jockey,"¹⁶⁴ which was time. Confronting this plight boils down to one simple question for Hamper and his coworkers:

[W]hat the fuck do you do to kill the clock? There were ways of handling nimwit supervisors and banana sticker rednecks and lopsided rails. But the clock was a

¹⁶¹ Ben Hamper, *Rivthead: Tales from the Assembly Line* (New York: Warner Books, 1991), 2.

¹⁶² Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 548.

¹⁶³ He acknowledged the irony of this point when he writes: "Working the line at GM was something fathers did so that their offspring wouldn't have to." *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

whole different mammal altogether. It sucked on you as you awaited the next job. It ridiculed you each time you'd take a peek. The more irritated you became, the slower it moved. Thinking was a very slow death at times.¹⁶⁵

As for Hamper's linking of thought and boredom, this is reminiscent of Jean Baudrillard's assertion that "the worst thing is when thought and language move at the same pace. That is when boredom sets in."¹⁶⁶ Depending on the situation, glancing at the clock can be an indication of one's boredom.¹⁶⁷ Outside of the factory, for example, while watching a film, a simple glance at one's watch indicates the viewer's boredom with what is on screen. The same struggle against the clock takes place both in the workplace and outside it. As for Hamper's battle with the clock, James Carey astutely observes the irony of the standard company retirement gift: "Modern conceptions of time have rooted into our consciousness so deeply that the scene of the worker receiving a watch at his retirement is grotesque and comic. He receives a watch when the need to tell time is ended. He receives a watch as a tribute to his learning the hardest lesson of the working man – to tell time."¹⁶⁸

Modernity in Particular: Railways

The new kinds of workspaces developed in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that emphasize the importance of technology, precision, time, and quantity effectively compound the effects of boredom. One of the most important technological advances that have influenced the 'modern conceptions of time' is the railway. While the factory is the symbol of industry, and the street is the archetypal

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Baudrillard, *Fragments: Cool Memories III*, 11. Further to Hamper's issue of what to do with the time, Baudrillard has outlined a similar interpretation: "Boredom is like a pitiless zooming in on the epidermis of time. Every instant is dilated and magnified like the pores of the face." Baudrillard, *Cool Memories I*, 100.

¹⁶⁷ IM, 263.

¹⁶⁸ James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), 176.

symbol of the urban, it has been said that the most “potent [and] dramatic symbol of the Industrial Revolution,”¹⁶⁹ railroads. Railroads are an important common element of the ‘double process’ of industrialization and urbanization. As Goodstein notes, “the railways speeded urbanization, facilitated industrialization by making production for distant markets efficient, and democratized travel.”¹⁷⁰ The Marxist geographer David Harvey, whom Andy Merrifield refers to as Henri Lefebvre’s “Anglo-Saxon soul mate,”¹⁷¹ offers the following expansive yet concise account of the importance railroad construction had in the nineteenth century:

[E]xcessive speculation in railroad construction triggered the first European-wide crisis of over-accumulation, the resolution to the crisis after 1850 rested heavily upon further exploration of temporal and spatial displacement. New systems of credit and corporate forms of organization, of distribution (the large department stores), coupled with technical and organizational innovations in production (increasing fragmentation, specialization, and de-skilling in the division of labour for example), helped speed up the circulation of capital in mass markets. More emphatically, capitalism became embroiled in an incredible phase of massive long-term investment in the conquest of space. The expansion of the railway network, accompanied by the advent of the telegraph, the growth of steam shipping, and the building of the Suez Canal, the beginnings of radio communication and bicycle and automobile travel at the end of the century, all changed the sense of time and space in radical ways.¹⁷²

The famed Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan illustrates in his book *Understanding Media* how the railway “accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure.”¹⁷³ Similarly, as the subtitle to Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s book *The Railway*

¹⁶⁹ Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: a Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1.

¹⁷⁰ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 176.

¹⁷¹ Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre*, 84.

¹⁷² David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 264.

¹⁷³ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, ed. W. Terrence Gordon (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2003), 20. Quoting McLuhan is somewhat of a problematic endeavour, as he seems to have as many supporters as he does detractors, especially when it comes to his magnum opus: *Understanding Media*. Somewhat of a celebrity (he made a cameo as himself in Woody Allen’s 1977 film

Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century indicates, the railways had a significant impact on both space and time.

But where does boredom come in? In a nice dialectical formulation, the British historian William Addison observes that “railways extended the range of pleasures as well as the range of boredom.”¹⁷⁴ With this, the triad of boredom-modernity-railways is beginning to take shape. All three emerged at the same time.

The modern world began with the coming of the railways. They turned the known universe upside down. They made a greater and more immediate impact than any other mechanical or industrial innovation before or since. They were the first technical invention which affected everyone in any country where they were built – which, effectively, meant most of the world. They were the noisy, smoky, obtrusive heralds of a civilization destined to be increasingly dominated by industrial innovations.¹⁷⁵

With this passage, the author, Nicholas Faith, makes the case for railroads as not only one of the driving forces of modernity, but *the* driving force of modernity. Of course, throughout the twentieth-century other modes of transportation have entered onto the scene. Lefebvre puts it the following way:

Undeniably the railways played a fundamental role in industrial capitalism and the organization of its national (and international) space. But at the same time, at

Annie Hall) and a household name, McLuhan’s infamous phrase ‘the medium is the message’ is arguably the media studies and communications equivalent to Albert Einstein’s formula $E = mc^2$. In both cases, brevity does not equate to simplicity. McLuhan’s critics find him innovative and imaginative, but also vague and imprecise, as well as widely speculative and lacking rigor in his research. For a thorough, balanced take on his reputation and the varied critical opinions on this particular text, see W. Terrence Gordon’s companion essay at the back of the critical edition of *Understanding Media*: “Critical Reception of *Understanding Media*,” 545-558. For the most critical assessment of McLuhan in general, but *Understanding Media* in particular, see Brian Winston, *Misunderstanding Media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). For an account of McLuhan’s specific detractors (Marxists, Scientists, etc), see Robert Macmillan, “Marshall McLuhan at the Mercy of His Commentators,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 22 (1992): 475-491. In order to address some of the misunderstandings with his work, McLuhan’s daughter Stephanie, as well as David Staines, assembled a variety of Marshall’s short, rare texts under the title ‘Understanding Me’. See, Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, eds. Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003). As for Lefebvre, he alludes approvingly to McLuhan’s concepts of ‘cool’ and ‘hot’ without mentioning him by name. See ELMW, 10. It is unclear what Lefebvre’s overall perspective is with regards to McLuhan and his work.

¹⁷⁴ William Addison, *English Fairs and Markets* (London: Batsford, 1953), 100.

¹⁷⁵ Nicholas Faith, *The World the Railways Made* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1991), 1.

an urban scale so did trams, underground railways, buses. Then on a worldwide scale: air transport. The previous organization disintegrates and the mode of production absorbs the results. A double process, visible for several decades in our towns and countryside, with the help of recent technology – but extending from the centres of cities to their distant outskirts.¹⁷⁶

Regardless of these more recent technological advances in travel, the enormous impact railways had on the experience of space and time deserves emphasis for its historical importance. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the effect of travelling by rail was presented as the “annihilation of space and time”¹⁷⁷ that these other modes of transportation would only accomplish afterwards. Marshall Berman sees the pre-determined route and time schedule made railways a “nineteenth-century paradigm of order.”¹⁷⁸ As was noted above in the previous section of this chapter, according to Benjamin, order such as this has an aura of mild boredom.

Martin Heidegger’s lecture course from 1929/30 is perhaps a good place to further establish connections between boredom, modernity, and the railroad. Though it is not the earliest writing on boredom, these lectures are one of the first thoroughly rigorous analyses of the phenomenon, and a brief excursion through the basic framework of his lectures, though far too complex to deal with in any great detail here, will suffice for the present purposes. The numerous secondary literature which cite or specifically address Heidegger’s work on boredom attest to its influence.¹⁷⁹ Here, Heidegger offers an

¹⁷⁶ KW, 212. As for air transport, Lefebvre writes elsewhere that “very few people’s lives have changed by air travel, and even then in only minor ways.” CEL 2, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 33.

¹⁷⁸ Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, 159.

¹⁷⁹ In a footnote to her chapter on Heidegger’s boredom lectures, Elizabeth Goodstein claims “relatively little commentary has been written on them.” *Experience Without Qualities*, 283. I disagree with Goodstein on this point. Of all the boredom scholars, Heidegger arguably has been given the most attention with the most commentary on his work, and is perhaps the most influential. See, for example, Giorgio Agamben, “Profound Boredom,” *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 63-70; Kevin A. Aho, “Acceleration and Time Pathologies: the Critique of Psychology in

original take on what he sees as the three forms of boredom,¹⁸⁰ as well as a methodological guide on how boredom can and should be grasped. Boredom in Heidegger's view is an 'attunement' that must be 'awakened'. To Heidegger, the "ordinary opinion" of attunements as "feelings [...] is correct within certain limits."¹⁸¹ Put simply, an attunement is not restricted to a state of mind, or something that is simply thought, but is something that is felt. There are many attunements and we are "never without an attunement [...] there is only ever a change of attunement."¹⁸² Something is always being felt. Heidegger would also note that "the attunements out of which our being gripped philosophically and our philosophical comprehension arise are always necessarily *fundamental attunements* [Grundstimmungen] out of Dasein," which means "philosophy [...] happens in a fundamental attunement."¹⁸³ To awaken the attunement of boredom is a specific process, which Heidegger differentiates from 'ascertaining'. Ascertaining is what scientists or social scientists do, whereas the properly philosophical way of analyzing boredom, according to Heidegger, is to let it reveal itself.

Heidegger mentions what could initially be referred to as superficial boredom, a more profound boredom, and then profound boredom. These are the three levels of escalating intensity in the experience of boredom. These three forms of boredom may not be a complete and definitive answer for Heidegger to the 'riddle' of boredom, but they are nevertheless important for the boredom literature. This seems to be a riddle that

Heidegger's *Beiträge*," *Time & Society* 16(1), (2007): 25-42; Miguel de Beistegui. "Boredom: Between Existence and History," *Thinking with Heidegger*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 61-82; Parvis Emad, "Boredom as Limit and Disposition," *Heidegger Studies* 1 (1985): 63-78.; Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, especially pages 107-132.

¹⁸⁰ These three forms of boredom escalate in intensity. 1) becoming bored by, 2) being bored with, and 3) profound boredom. Although only the first form is dealt with in this chapter, the second form will be discussed in chapter two and the third form will be discussed in chapter three.

¹⁸¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 65.

¹⁸² Ibid., 68.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 7.

cannot be solved, at least not in its entirety. However, Heidegger philosophizes a key for understanding boredom by noting the “two structural moments” for the all types of boredom. These structural moments are ‘being held in limbo’ and ‘coming to be left empty’.¹⁸⁴ The first type of boredom, ‘becoming bored by’, is a situational boredom where one can point to what is boring. It can be characterized as a form of boredom where one can identify the source by pointing towards ‘this’ or ‘that’.¹⁸⁵ This train station is boring, that store over there looks boring, etc. It is this first type of boredom where railways, modernity, and boredom come together.

Waiting for the Train

For the first type of boredom identified in his lectures, Heidegger uses an example of waiting at a train station for a train whose arrival is approximately four hours away. In his lectures he uses the inclusive ‘we’ in order to convey to his class that they, too, are part of the philosophizing taking place. ‘We’ mistakenly arrived at the train station too early and are stuck there while having to wait for the train to arrive. To pass the time ‘we’ have a book in a rucksack, but it does not entice at the moment. This is an interesting refusal, as Orrin E. Klapp has mentioned a case where he can “call to mind a man who says he carries a book wherever he goes, to avoid boredom while waiting or riding.”¹⁸⁶ But, what if, as in Heidegger’s example, the man becomes bored of the book? This seems to demonstrate different levels of intensity for the same type of boredom. Boredom awakens, but can then be subdued with a book. A more intense experience presents itself and boredom awakens and smothers any interest in the book.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 106.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 114.

¹⁸⁶ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 11.

Aside from the book buried in the rucksack, Heidegger goes on to mention various ways of passing the time while waiting for this train such as going for a walk, counting trees, drawing in the nearby sand, all the while looking at a watch to see how much time has gone by (or has not gone by). Although this experience of waiting may seem like boredom, Heidegger writes: “Being bored is neither a waiting nor a being impatient. This having to wait and our impatience may be present and surround boredom, but they never constitute boredom itself.”¹⁸⁷ Heidegger notes that waiting can be filled with suspense and thus is not necessarily boring. As mentioned above, Walter Benjamin, in contrast to Heidegger, uses waiting as a key aspect of his conception of boredom throughout the section in his *Arcades Project* that deals with boredom.¹⁸⁸ As opposed to Heidegger’s example of waiting for something that we know, or think we know is coming, Benjamin does not attach any specific thing or event to this waiting. Instead, waiting in Benjamin’s sense is free floating without any specific future thing or event to look forward to and to anchor oneself. “Waiting,” quips Benjamin, “is in a sense, the lined interior of boredom.”¹⁸⁹ For Heidegger, then, waiting may surround boredom, but to Benjamin, it is at the core of boredom.

The train station in Heidegger’s example does not include other potential passengers (unless the students in his class are considered passengers). Perhaps this is due to the fact that the train will not arrive for another four hours. The example given by Heidegger is one where there is very little to do at the station, except wait. It should be

¹⁸⁷ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 94.

¹⁸⁸ Further to this point, Harold Schweizer begins his recent book with a quote from Thomas Mann’s novel *The Magic Mountain* which reads: “Waiting, one says, is boring.” *On Waiting* (London: Routledge, 2008), 1. This is not entirely accurate, as waiting can be an experience filled with dread or anxiety, depending on what, if anything, one is waiting for.

¹⁸⁹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 118.

noted that railway stations became less desolate as time wore on than the picture Heidegger portrays in his lectures. For example, Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes that “in the late 1840s, English booksellers established stalls in railway stations, as well as a peculiar kind of lending library, to meet the general demand for things to read while travelling.”¹⁹⁰ On this point, it is worthwhile to recall Benjamin’s above-mentioned claim that the 1840s saw an outbreak of boredom. According to one railroad expert, Nicholas Faith, “in Britain bad books are sold by their thousands in stations to relieve the monotony...the boredom...the impatience of the journey.”¹⁹¹ But why is the railway journey so boring? While Heidegger’s example helps to think about the boredom of a train station, although that was not his primary intention, the example ends before the arrival of the train, so there is only a partial picture of the railway journey.

Travelling on the Train

In his book *Overload and Boredom*, the sociologist Orrin E. Klapp examines railway travel, but, instead of waiting for a train to appear, he discusses waiting while one is travelling on the train. As opposed to the monotony of waiting for its arrival, this is the boredom of waiting for the train to disappear. If there was a certain relief from one’s boredom when the train arrives at the station, it could be awoken when one is actually riding on the rails. The arrival of the train is only a temporary relief from boredom, as the realization of more waiting becomes clear to the passenger. To illustrate this, Klapp describes a hypothetical situation of being a passenger on a train that has no distractions such as a book, newspaper, or game of some sort. Klapp, unlike Heidegger, discusses three types of travelling companions one could encounter on a train: 1) one that does not

¹⁹⁰ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 65.

¹⁹¹ Faith, *The World the Railways Made*, 247.

talk very much, if at all, 2) one that talks too much about too little, and 3) one that “rambles on about everything.”¹⁹² These are all variations of ‘bores’.¹⁹³ Though the ‘we’ in Heidegger’s example may be momentarily relieved of boredom when ‘we’ gets on the train, ‘we’ may wish to reach in our satchel for the book ‘we’ are carrying. It should be noted that, “[t]he act of reading itself was effectively modernized by the railway too, because the train’s motion made unprecedented demands on the reader’s concentration, enforcing short bursts of attention.”¹⁹⁴ So, although the ‘we’ in Heidegger’s example may be momentarily relieved of boredom when ‘we’ get on the train, ‘we’ may wish to reach in our rucksack for the book ‘we’ are carrying if ‘we’ encounter one of Klapp’s three travelling companions. However, the book itself may bore us.

Train travel in general, according to Goodstein, was a major source of boredom.¹⁹⁵ Goodstein relies on the work of Wolfgang Schivelbusch to make this point. So, aside from the ‘bores’ in Klapp’s example, what is it that happens on the train to induce boredom? According to Schivelbusch, in the nineteenth century railway travel was a culture shock for those who were used to pre-industrial modes of transportation and were “not able to develop modes of perception appropriate to the new form of transportation.”¹⁹⁶ Schivelbusch continues:

Dullness and boredom resulted from attempts to carry the perceptual apparatus of traditional travel, with its intense appreciation of landscape, over to the railway. The inability to acquire a mode of perception adequate to technological travel crossed all political, ideological and esthetic lines, and appeared among the most disparate personalities of the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 50.

¹⁹³ I discuss ‘bores’ in more depth in the second chapter.

¹⁹⁴ Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman, “Introduction: Tracks to Modernity,” *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 23.

¹⁹⁵ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 176-179.

¹⁹⁶ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 58.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

While the boredom induced by railway travel was experienced on a mass scale, Schivelbusch uses the famed author Gustave Flaubert¹⁹⁸ as a representative example of the boredom induced by railway travel:

Flaubert wrote to a friend in 1864: ‘I get so bored on the train that I am about to howl with tedium after five minutes of it. One might think that it’s a dog someone has forgotten in the compartment; not at all, it is M. Flaubert, groaning’. Before a railway journey, Flaubert stayed up all night in order to be able to sleep through the journey and not experience it at all: he could do nothing with the vista offered to him by the compartment window. The most diverse sources provide any number of similar complaints.¹⁹⁹

What is so intriguing about Flaubert’s boredom is that, according to Schivelbusch, similar complaints could have come from any number of railway passengers.

Goodstein has noted how Flaubert once claimed in regards to the title character in his masterpiece *Madame Bovary*, Emma Bovary, “Emma, c’est moi,”²⁰⁰ which roughly translates into English as “I am Emma.” It is no surprise, then, that Goodstein calls this particular novel “the epic of modern boredom.”²⁰¹ Goodstein also notes that “it is as the object as well as the subject of boredom that Flaubert’s Emma Bovary epitomizes the dilemma of the modern subject, for whom desire has come unhinged from the narratives that once rendered life meaningful. Her tragedy exemplifies the fate of that subject, adrift in a world without God, without History, without hope.”²⁰² Interestingly, Andreas Huyssen believes “one of the founding texts of modernism, if there ever was one, is

¹⁹⁸ Lefebvre indirectly linked Flaubert with boredom. In the first volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre referred to Flaubert as “the petty bourgeois who hated the petty bourgeoisie (they all hated and despised one another). CEL 1, 108. A few pages earlier in the same text, Lefebvre writes: “The minds of the petty bourgeois were crammed with prejudice, *boredom*, ideals.” CEL 1, 104. (my italics)

¹⁹⁹ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 58.

²⁰⁰ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 188.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 184.

²⁰² Ibid., 185.

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.²⁰³ Following this line of thought, it is somewhat odd to equate an eminently interesting text such as *Madame Bovary* with boredom. How can a book belonging to the canon of modernism be depicted as the epic of modern boredom?²⁰⁴ Quite simply, in modernity the line between the interesting and the boring cannot be safely distinguished. The boundary between what is interesting and what is boring is often blurred.

The Dialectic of Boredom and Interest

While referring to the “history of industrialized society,” Lefebvre mentions the steady progression of “stagnation beneath the mask of frenetic agitation.”²⁰⁵ With respect to boredom, it is often hidden beneath the interesting. Despite the intensification of the rhythms of life, the seemingly perpetual expansion of the urban fabric, the exponential growth of digital technologies, despite all of these interesting things, there nevertheless is a great deal of boredom. From a Lefebvrian perspective, boredom and interest are dialectically related. This is prevalent in the boredom literature, albeit without the authors explicitly acknowledging it. For example, in their introductory contribution to the aptly titled collection *Essays on Boredom and Modernity*, Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani assert that “modern boredom is construed as an aesthetic and psychological problem, which consists in a lack of resources to make life interesting.”²⁰⁶ Boredom is here opposed to interest. Despite not alluding to aesthetics or psychology, Spacks makes

²⁰³ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44.

²⁰⁴ Terry Eagleton has rejected this equation outright. He writes: “[I]t would be an unskillful reading of, say, *Madame Bovary* to find it no more than the tale of a bored housewife.” *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 53.

²⁰⁵ IM, 223.

²⁰⁶ Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, “The Delicate Monster,” *Essays on Boredom and Modernity*, eds. Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani (New York: Rodopi, 2009), 23.

a similar point in writing: “the interesting (in its modern version) and the boring imply one another [...] Interesting means not boring; the boring is the not interesting.”²⁰⁷

The interesting poses a significant problem for Spacks roughly halfway through her book. The sole interlude in Spacks’s book is devoted to what she calls the “problem of the interesting.” Why is it that halfway through her book on boredom Spacks pauses to reflect on the interesting? Is it because the problem of the interesting is the same as the problem of boredom? Without going this far, Spacks was, however, right to note there is some kind of relationship between boredom and interest. Lars Svendsen argues that “the word ‘boring’ is bound up with the word ‘interesting’; the words became widespread at roughly the same time and they increase in frequency at roughly the same rate.”²⁰⁸ This seems to resolve a major theoretical deadlock in Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* when he asks the essential question: “What is the dialectical antithesis to boredom?”²⁰⁹ As was seen above in the first part of this chapter, Bertrand Russell argues that excitement is the antithesis to boredom. Here, the dialectical antithesis is a much more general term: interesting.

In the first section of this chapter, Joseph Brodsky’s convocation address to Dartmouth College was discussed. In a similar context, in keeping with the relatively insulated sphere of academia, conference presentations can serve as an example of the proliferation of boredom masked only by the absence of it being verbalized. “When, at a conference,” muses the Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek, “a speakers asks me: ‘Did you like my talk?’, how do I politely imply that it was boring and

²⁰⁷ Spacks, *Boredom*, 116.

²⁰⁸ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 28.

²⁰⁹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 105.

stupid? By saying: It was interesting.”²¹⁰ Boredom is here masked as its opposite. In this context the two terms appear interchangeable. Of course, the question arises, in this situation how does one signal that they were actually interested in the talk? The term interesting seems to be spoken for. It is not as though people can say they were bored in order to imply they were interested. Indeed, an appropriate question to ask is: “Where does interest end and boredom begin, and why there?”²¹¹ Such a question is, of course, under the presumption that one can actually draw a line to differentiate between boredom and interesting. Such a seemingly trivial task is by no means a simple one. What if instead of looking for a discontinuity, or the point(s) of rupture, we look at the continuity between boredom and interest?

It is pertinent to again pick up a previously mentioned thread, that of the linguistic emergence of boredom. Following Goodstein, as well as Spacks and Svendsen, if we are willing to put our trust in the Oxford English Dictionary, the word ‘interesting’, much like boredom, did not exist until the late eighteenth century. Spacks notes how the Oxford English Dictionary lists 1768 as the date of its ‘official’ emergence.²¹² Here is the entry:

*Interesting: Adapted to excite interest; having the qualities which rouse curiosity, engage attention, or appeal to the emotions; of interest.*²¹³

During the exact same year (1768) the verb ‘bore’ emerged for the first time. The brief entry is the following:

*Bore: To weary by tedious conversation or simply by the failure to be interesting.*²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 11.

²¹¹ Peter Frank, “Fluxus Music,” In *Breaking the Sound Barrier: a Critical Anthology of the New Music*, ed. Battcock Gregory (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), 16.

²¹² Spacks, *Boredom*, 114.

²¹³ *The Oxford English Dictionary* 2nd Edition, Volume 7, 1100.

It is well worth noting how these two words emerged simultaneously. Furthermore, the definition of 'bore' specifically hinges on lack of interest.

Spacks's study, primarily of literary works, is above all else concerned with this contrast, or, as she puts it, "the polarities of boredom and interest."²¹⁵ The contrast between these two polarities is prevalent in the boredom literature, such as when Klapp argues that "lack of interest is the heart of boredom."²¹⁶ Similarly, for Spacks, what is boring is often thought of as what is not interesting and vice versa. However, Spacks does believe that a boring object (such as a novel) can be interesting and an object that was once interesting can become boring in a process she calls "cultural oscillations."²¹⁷ Such cultural oscillations, I argue following Lefebvre, are prominent features of modernity. In his book *Introduction to Modernity*, Lefebvre describes the omnipresence of interesting things available for consumption in modernity:

There is a proliferation of interests and centres of interest. How many fascinating things there are, how many fascinating people, and objects, and subjects! Never before has news been so fertile, so full of surprises. How does it come about that when something is interesting, boredom is always lurking in the background? How incredibly swiftly does the one turn into the other!²¹⁸

Further on in the same book Lefebvre picks up this line of argumentation:

Suffice it to note that pleasurable elements of *interest* are no longer defined by themselves, but by what is devoid of interest, that is, by their opposite. Unfortunately, interest is a short-lived phenomenon. It is quickly exhausted. The interesting becomes boring. As soon as it is no longer topical, as soon as the brief, orgasmic instant during which it disguises boredom is over, it too enters the realm of the boring, making way for boredom in all its unpasteurized purity. Something we found intensely interesting last year bores us today. It is finished,

²¹⁴ Ibid., Volume 2, 414.

²¹⁵ Spacks, *Boredom*, 183. Though Spacks is not referring to herself, it is clear from the repetition of these two concepts throughout her text that these are two core concepts in her study.

²¹⁶ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 35.

²¹⁷ Spacks, *Boredom*, 129.

²¹⁸ IM, 194-195.

empty. Everything (no matter what: anecdotes, small news items, etc.) can become interesting. It is merely a question of getting the presentation right, meeting a few technical requirements: surprise, suspense. If there is anything more boring than an interesting thing which has ceased to be interesting, it is something which has not been successfully 'put across'. This could be one of the dialectical movements within 'modernity', one of its concealed movements.²¹⁹

With this passage we see that Lefebvre has identified a dialectical process of the boring and the interesting that is specific to modernity. There is a unity of opposites. This is one of Lefebvre's most original contributions to the boredom literature. This is an important point, as this gives some colour to the dialectic of mass culture, first mentioned in my introductory chapter, which will inform the rest of this dissertation.

If one is to locate the sources of boredom, one must not only look at what is under-stimulating, or what it is over-stimulating, but also at what was once interesting and is now boring. Although similar to Spacks's work in this respect, a key difference is Spacks refers to different centuries where individuals from different eras have different tastes and preferences whereas Lefebvre is referring to the short lifespan of interest. Instead of a shift over the course of one century, the span of one year can be the difference between something interesting and something boring. With this in mind, it is important to link Lefebvre's dialectic with the work of Orrin E. Klapp.

Akin to Lefebvre, Klapp, perhaps because he was a sociologist like Lefebvre, sees boredom as a complex social problem which to him means "not only that it affects a considerable number of people, but that some of its causes are systemic – structural, cultural, or communicational."²²⁰ Klapp formulates two "sides" to boredom: underload

²¹⁹ Ibid., 260. To pick up a thread mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter regarding the pleasure principle, it is important to note the next line in this passage: "If that is the case, it is impossible to return to Stendhal's pleasure principle. What point is there in turning to something which no longer has any meaning?" Ibid., 260-261.

²²⁰ Klapp. *Overload and Boredom*, 27.

and overload.²²¹ Simply put, underload stems from a lack of stimulation, whereas overload is an overabundance of stimulation. Both too much and too little stimulation lead to boredom. Underload is the most common perception of boredom as being left empty by not having enough to do. Whereas, overload is being left empty by having too much to do, or, as Klapp would put it, too much information to process. Boredom, then, according to Klapp, attacks on either side of the stimulation found in one's everyday life. That is, both the underwhelming aspects of the routine, dull, and monotonous, as well as the overwhelming aspects of having an abundance of exciting, thrilling, and amusing experiences are roads leading to the experience of boredom. Lefebvre's dialectic establishes a third term, so to speak, in this theory. Instead of too much stimulation or an absence of stimulation, the dialectical process of boredom identified by Lefebvre occurs even when the stimulation is just right.

Klapp begins his book with a discussion of the amount of multitasking – that is to say, distraction – people partake in on a daily basis, which is typical of recent modernity. The example given is reading the morning newspaper while listening to the radio, or watching the television, or perhaps all three! Using somewhat dated references from the 1980s such as 'walkmans' and 'ghetto blasters', Klapp's message nevertheless remains clear: "boredom as we experience it today is more likely to be from an *overload* than an underload."²²² Similar to Lefebvre's dialectic of mass culture, Klapp sees boredom at its most powerful when there is a great deal of interesting things, as opposed to not enough interesting things. As has already been made clear, this is a counterintuitive assertion, as boredom is often associated with a lack of stimulation not overstimulation.

²²¹ Ibid., 49.

²²² Ibid., 3.

Instead of lacking something, the boredom that arises from an overload of information stems from either “too much redundancy or too much noise.”²²³ These terms are fairly vague, so it would be beneficial to ask: What exactly does Klapp mean when he uses the term ‘noise’? In a very basic way, he formulates it as “the meaning-defeating (boring) element in variety.”²²⁴ This is a nice, compact definition, but it requires an additional explanation to understand what he means by the term ‘variety’. Variety, as Klapp uses it, is the opposite of redundancy. Variety offers choice and options, whereas redundancy is more of the same. In this sense, “boredom is bimodal.”²²⁵ It can arise from too much or too little variety. The overwhelming abundance of information in an information society is extremely difficult to sift through. How can you tell what is important information and what is misinformation? There is simply too much to examine it all. Sifting through all the information will ensure that one will ultimately encounter a lot of noise.

Who generally encounters this noise? It would seem as though most people do. Klapp quotes a manager of a refrigerator manufacturing company who offers his assessment of society: “We’re all bored with what we are doing. Students don’t want to study; workers don’t want to work. Managers don’t want to manage; garbage collectors don’t want to collect garbage. The question nowadays is ‘Who wants to do what they’re supposed to do’?”²²⁶ This is a rather stark worldview where no one is happy with what they are doing. People simply tolerate the work they have to do and are bored because of

²²³ Ibid., 11.

²²⁴ Ibid., 83.

²²⁵ Ibid., 123.

²²⁶ Ibid., 12. From a management perspective, it has been argued that boredom can and should be “creatively managed.” Gary Gemmill and Judith Oakley, “The Meaning of Boredom in Organizational Life,” *Group & Organizational Management* 17(4), (December, 1992): 358.

it. This is a similar sentiment as the one found in Theodor Adorno's claim: "Boredom is a function of life which is lived under the compulsion to work, and under strict division of labour."²²⁷ Surely this is not the case for everyone. To take an example from what Adorno would call the 'Culture Industry', with the numerous magazines populating newsstands, available for purchase every week, it seems as though there are some writers who like to write. Similarly, with the amount of new films that debut at the local cinema every week, it seems as though some actors still like to act, directors like to direct, and producers like to produce. But does the production of these works actually say anything about whether or not people are bored? These positions are somewhat more glamorous than collecting garbage, but are these workers less bored? Perhaps they are less bored. Then again, maybe they are not. Are these workers not bored at all? Such complete satisfaction with one's work at all times would be an amazing, if not impossible feat given the spatio-temporal constraints and opportunities they face in modernity. Boredom appears to be far too ubiquitous for people to completely escape its grasp. Indeed, it appears to be a virtually inescapable feature of everyday life in the modern world. Following this, I will now turn my attention to Henri Lefebvre's project of a critique of everyday life to further explore the problematic of boredom in modernity.

²²⁷ Adorno goes on to make the utopian claim that "it need not be so." Theodor Adorno, "Free Time," *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 192. Similarly, Adorno's fellow Frankfurt School member Erich Fromm writes: "Modern man does not know what to do with himself, how to spend his lifetime meaningfully, and he is driven to work in order to avoid an unbearable boredom." Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 179.

Chapter 2: The Absence of Style in Everyday Life

Boredom is the everyday become manifest: as a consequence of having lost its essential – constitutive – trait of being *unperceived*.¹ – Maurice Blanchot

The quotidian is [...] the realm of routine, repetition, reiteration: the space/time where constraints and boredom are produced.² – Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross

[B]oredom born out of boredom.³ – Ezra Pound

* * * * *

The previous chapter dealt with the proliferation of boredom as a mass phenomenon historically specific to modernity, a strand of boredom studies principally associated with the work of Elizabeth Goodstein and her book *Experience Without Qualities*. The point of departure for this chapter is Henri Lefebvre's assertion that "the everyday is covered by a surface: that of modernity."⁴ This adds another dimension to the relationship between boredom and modernity. With this, a conceptual triad of boredom-modernity-everyday life has emerged. Following Goodstein's assertion that the problems for theorizing boredom are the same as those for theorizing modern experience, and following Lefebvre's argument that modernity is the surface of everyday life, the question being asked is: How is boredom related to everyday life? For this, one must begin to formulate everyday life as a concept. This is lacking in the majority of literature on boredom, as some boredom theorists believe the everyday is what obscures one's analysis of boredom.⁵

¹ Maurice Blanchot, "Everyday Speech," *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 16.

² Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, "Introduction," *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 3.

³ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1970), 65.

⁴ EE, 10.

⁵ Michael Sheringham has authored a well detailed study of everyday life where he describes what he calls the "negative picture" of everyday life when he writes: "Everydayness is more or less exclusively associated with what is *boring*, habitual, mundane, uneventful, trivial, humdrum, repetitive, inauthentic, and unrewarding." Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23. (my italics). It would follow, then, that the boring is negative for many people. It should be mentioned that this 'negative picture' is not his own. Sheringham

Michael Raposa invites the readers of his book *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* to “shake off the veil of everydayness”⁶ from boredom. For Raposa, the experience of boredom has a bad reputation as something ordinary and entirely lacking even the slightest shred of profundity when it associates with ‘everydayness’. Raposa seems to be suggesting that boredom ought to be analyzed by discarded its everydayness. What if, however, this everydayness is also the key to understanding boredom? It would be prudent to turn to Lefebvre to confront Raposa’s recommendation, specifically with one of his questions: “Why wouldn’t the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?”⁷ Indeed, why is the ordinary treated as insignificant and unworthy of attention? Or, in Raposa’s case, why is the ordinary divorced from being extraordinary? This may appear as obvious, but when one looks closely it is not an easy distinction to make. For this, Lefebvre would say that “[p]eople who gather flowers and nothing but flowers tend to look upon soil as something dirty.”⁸ Continuing with the metaphor, it is as if flowers are mysterious, but soil is nothing but commonplace material and all too obvious. Effectively, it could be said that Raposa wants to pluck the flower from the dirt without realizing the flower cannot grow without the dirt or the dirt has its beauty just like the flower.

Ironically, Raposa’s wish to unveil boredom, thus revealing what it truly is, actually creates a veil. Removing the supposed ‘veil’ of everydayness is exactly what

is merely recounting what he sees as the commonsense notion of everyday life, but he unfortunately does not extend this thought to a thorough analysis of boredom. Sheringham treats this as though it is obvious, which, of course, it is. That is, it is obvious in a commonsensical way. Such a view does not, however, take a full picture of boredom, one that is not so quick to label boredom as a negative experience. Aside from a select few authors, boredom and everyday life are not studied together. Those who study everyday life do not necessarily include boredom for analysis and vice versa.

⁶ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, xi.

⁷ EE, 9.

⁸ CEL 1, 87.

should *not* happen when thinking about boredom. Instead, the everyday should be analyzed as a significant phenomenon much the same as boredom. Or, perhaps more concretely, the everyday should be analyzed as a condition of boredom. Instead of ‘shaking off’ the everyday, it should be embraced.⁹ Shaking off the everyday from boredom robs boredom of its essence. As Ben Anderson puts it, “[t]o be bored, or perhaps more importantly to potentially/probably be bored, has become part of the common-place experiential fabric, the affective texture, of Modern everyday life.”¹⁰ Similarly, Goodstein begins her book with a simple definition of boredom by claiming in the very first line: “It is an experience without qualities, this *quotidian* crisis of meaning.”¹¹

I follow Lefebvre by arguing that everydayness does not simply veil the extraordinariness of boredom. Rather, attempting to remove a veil that does not exist brings forth the opposite goal. That is to say, everydayness does not veil boredom, it is the foundation of boredom. If this claim is to be upheld, Lefebvre’s concept of the everyday must be articulated. It will be argued that Lefebvre’s work is a key to understanding the complex relationship between boredom, modernity, and everyday life.¹²

There are four main parts to this chapter. The first part will outline Lefebvre’s intellectual contours via a critique of Laurie Langbauer’s book *Novels of Everyday Life*. After establishing what Lefebvre’s project is not, some common links will be presented

⁹ This point follows Lefebvre’s assertion that “Nothing gives these specialists the right to observe everyday life from aloft and from afar simply because they do not deem it worthy of being a specialism.” CEL 2, 25.

¹⁰ Ben Anderson, “Time-Stilled Space-Slowed: How Boredom Matters,” *Geoforum* 35 (2004): 739.

¹¹ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 1. (my italics)

¹² Peter Conrad has linked boredom with everyday life, however the bulk of his work stems from a reading of Patricia Meyer Spacks’ book. See Conrad, “It’s Boring: Notes on the Meanings of Boredom in Everyday Life,” *Qualitative Sociology* 20(4), (1997): 465-475.

between Lefebvre and other thinkers, specifically Theodor Adorno. Part two extends part one by delving into the specifics of Lefebvre's project of a critique of everyday life. The third part discusses Lefebvre's concept of an 'absence of style' as a key factor in the emergence of boredom as a mass phenomenon in modernity. The last part will follow from the theory of an 'absence of style' in everyday life with various attempts to fill this absence by spending time, specifically leisure time, as a form of escapism from the boredom of everyday life.¹³ The goal of this chapter is to include everyday life as an important facet to understanding the historical specificity of boredom in modernity, and establish the background of modernity and everyday life for the chapters that follow.

Contours of the *Critique of Everyday Life*

Before continuing with the conceptual triad of boredom-modernity-everyday life, it is important to sketch the contours of the third term, everyday life. For this, it would be prudent, in keeping with the above metaphor of the flower and dirt, to disentangle Lefebvre's *Critique* from some of the weeds of criticism that have grown around it in recent time, thus making it easier to see through the weeds to the dirt and flowers behind them. Like many important thinkers, there is certainly nothing obvious or simplistic about Lefebvre's overall intellectual project. In order to utilize Lefebvre's notion of everyday life for the duration of this dissertation, it is necessary to sketch the contours of his critique of everyday life, and in order to grasp the contents of his project, it is necessary to also say what it is not. No doubt Lefebvre appears to be standing on his head to some since he is rarely straightforward in his theorizing. On the surface, Lefebvre may appear to be as his opposite. In order for Lefebvre to appear in his rightful

¹³ Lefebvre argued that along with "philosophy and contemplation, dream and art, violent political or warlike action" everyday life is also criticized "by flight and escape." CEL 1, 29.

position of standing on firm ground, it will be beneficial to examine some assertions made by one of his critics, Laurie Langbauer, who, I argue, has represented Lefebvre's project in a manner that differs quite markedly from my own. With this, it is hoped that we can see where Lefebvre truly stands before applying his work elsewhere.

Negative Definition of Everyday Life

Laurie Langbauer's book *Novels of Everyday Life* is an ideal point of departure with her negative use of Lefebvre's project to articulate her position.¹⁴ Further, in this text Langbauer discusses several topics that are of interest for this dissertation: everydayness, the city, modernity, and, of course, boredom. While Langbauer's text covers many of the themes that are of interest to Lefebvre, her book is nevertheless a microcosm of mistaken identity regarding Lefebvre's basic position. By arguing this point I should make it clear that Langbauer's book is not about Lefebvre. For the present purposes, I am not interested in critiquing her entire work. It should also be noted that Langbauer's text is a valuable addition to the literature on everyday life in general. For example, she is quite correct in her assessment of the boringness of everydayness when she writes: "the problem with the everyday is trying to get anyone interested in it."¹⁵ Lefebvre would certainly agree with this statement, but that is probably where their commonality stops. In Langbauer's critique of Lefebvre's work she has attributed numerous positions that, I would argue, bear little resemblance to Lefebvre's overall project. In fact, many of Langbauer's points articulate the exact opposite of Lefebvre's position.

¹⁴ Lefebvre would surely approve of Langbauer's approach of tarrying with the negative, as well as the one being employed on this page, as he believed "the first definition of everyday life is a *negative* one." CEL 1, 86.

¹⁵ Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life*, 136.

To begin, it is important to consider Langbauer's portrayal of Lefebvre's intellectual heritage. In a footnote to her book *Novel of Everyday Life*, Langbauer charges that Lefebvre "was working from Lukács and Heidegger."¹⁶ To her, these two figures are the roots of Lefebvre's position. It is certainly accurate with regards to chronology, considering that both Lukács and Heidegger established themselves as leading thinkers well before Lefebvre did. As well, this is an understandable claim since these two thinkers both developed their respective notions of the everyday before Lefebvre.¹⁷ Such an assertion is, nevertheless, an incorrect one if one considers Lefebvre's own comments on these two figures. In the third volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre makes it clear that "[i]t would be incorrect and dishonest to say that the critique of everyday life derives its philosophical positions from either Lukács or Heidegger."¹⁸ It is understandable that Langbauer missed this assertion since the third volume of Lefebvre's *Critique* was translated into English several years after her book was published. It is, nevertheless, puzzling, as she had access to Michel Trebitsch's preface to the English translation of the first volume of the *Critique* published in 1991. There,

¹⁶ Ibid., 129. Later in the same book, Langbauer is less certain of this link when she writes that Lefebvre's work on the everyday "*perhaps* took its understanding from Lukács." Ibid., 177. (my italics) It has been argued, however, that Lukács was influential on other theorists of the everyday. For example, Michael Gardiner has shown a relationship between Agnes Heller's conceptualization of everyday life with that of Georg Lukács. See chapter 6 of Gardiner's *Critiques*. For the triad of Lukács, Heidegger, and Heller, see Sheringham's *Everyday Life*, 31-39.

¹⁷ Tony Bennett and Diane Watson make the same claim when they write that Lefebvre owed "his interest in the concept of everyday life to the work of Lukács and Heidegger." Bennett and Watson, "Understanding Everyday Life: An Introduction," *Understanding Everyday Life*, eds. Tony Bennett and Diane Watson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), xiv.

¹⁸ CEL 3, 18. For differing positions on Heidegger's influence on Lefebvre, see Stuart Elden, "Between Marx and Heidegger: Politics, Philosophy and Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*," *Antipode* 36(1) 2004: 86-105 and Geoffrey Waite, "Lefebvre Without Heidegger: 'Left-Heideggerianism' *qua* *conradictio in adiecto*," In *Space, Difference, Everyday Life; Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 94-114.

Trebitsch argues that “for Lefebvre everyday life is not reduced to the inauthenticity of *Alltglichkeit*, as in Heidegger or Lukcs.”¹⁹

Keeping with its philosophical underpinnings, Langbauer situates Lefebvre’s work within the long and esteemed lineage of system builders found in what could be called ‘traditional philosophy’. She claims that “[i]n insisting on a system, Lefebvre still gestures to totality, but his system continually calls its own notion of totality into question.”²⁰ Langbauer’s claim is not entirely false, as she touches on the openness of Lefebvre’s thought when she writes that he puts the ‘notion of totality into question’. There are essentially two issues here: systemic thought and the concept of totality. ‘Totality’ is a key issue in Lefebvre’s philosophical and sociological thought, which will be dealt with below.²¹ For now, it is important to dwell on Langbauer’s claim that Lefebvre insists on a system. On this point I must be perfectly clear in my response. Lefebvre was unabashedly an anti-systemic thinker and was unambiguous in his disavowal of system building. For example, the last line of his book *The Production of Space* not only casts a backward glance to the words that preceded it, winding its way all the way back to the front cover, but I would argue that it also applies to his entire oeuvre. Without any ambiguity, Lefebvre asserts: “And we are concerned with nothing that even remotely resembles a system.”²² In addition, Lefebvre has specifically stated that unlike traditional philosophers, “I don’t build a system.”²³ If taken at his word, Lefebvre was

¹⁹ Michel Trebitsch, “Preface,” In CEL 1, xxiii-xiv.

²⁰ Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life*, 20.

²¹ While a ‘key’ to his thought, Lefebvre acknowledges the difficulties in employing such a concept: “One cannot, however, avoid the fact that the notion of “totality” is difficult to define and even more difficult to employ.” SM, ix.

²² PS, 423.

²³ Leszek Kolakowski and Henri Lefebvre, “Evolution or Revolution,” 202.

not a system builder. The openness of his work, as well as the erratic manner in which his prose often flow, would also signal a disdain for creating a system.

Describing her own project, Langbauer writes that she is “interested that one reaction to the everyday can be pleasure – and not just with the banalized tedium that someone like Henri Lefebvre or Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno wants to locate in serial production.” She goes on to say that her “version of the everyday brings [her] lasting comfort, deep and abiding joy.”²⁴ With this, Langbauer defines her ‘version of the everyday’ against Lefebvre’s. As will be made clear later on, Langbauer is quite correct to see similarities in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer with Lefebvre. Although, what she sees is infinitely dirtier, messier than is actually the case. That is to say, she is arguing that these three figures dwell in the mud of everyday life without any appreciation for the joy or comfort it offers.

Lefebvre’s take on everyday life is much more nuanced than Langbauer gives him credit for. For example, Mary McLeod, in her summary of Lefebvre’s project, argues that “it is difficult to sustain the optimism of Lefebvre’s vision.”²⁵ Recall Lefebvre’s claim, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, which I shall paraphrase here, that those who gather flowers tend to look at dirt as something insignificant and unworthy of attention. As was discussed earlier, the boredom theorist Michael Raposa was trying to wash boredom clean of its messy ‘veil’ of everydayness. Langbauer is here doing the exact same thing. I do not doubt that Langbauer’s everyday life is filled with deep joy and lasting comfort, but whatever splendours she enjoys are not the same circumstances as those that work on a factory line, serve pretzels to passengers on a plane, answer

²⁴ Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life*, 3.

²⁵ Mary McLeod, “Henri Lefebvre’ Critique of Everyday Life: an Introduction,” In *Architecture of the Future*, eds. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 28.

telephone calls from customers with a smorgasbord of dispositions, etc. To Langbauer, it is as if Lefebvre and company found no joy whatsoever within the everyday. I argue that this is simply incorrect. Lefebvre's account of the everyday is a dialectical one, "allusive" even.²⁶ There is a "double dimension" to the everyday, which Lefebvre argues oscillates between "platitude and profoundness, banality and drama."²⁷ In a similar manner, Ben Highmore writes that everyday life alternates in and between two experiences, boredom and mystery.²⁸ Both Lefebvre and Highmore leave space for joy and comfort, but that is only one side of the coin of everyday life. It appears as though Langbauer attributed Lefebvre's position with the characteristics of someone like Arthur Schopenhauer, who, instead of Lefebvre's dimensions of platitude/banality and profoundness/drama, limits life to two other dimensions: pain and boredom.²⁹ It would seem as though Langbauer's position is the exact opposite of Schopenhauer's. Much the same as in physics where a collision between matter and anti-matter will leave no trace if they were to collide, if Schopenhauer and Langbauer were somehow to have the opportunity to meet, they would vanish upon the introductory handshake.

²⁶ SC, 58. Lefebvre himself acknowledges that the first volume of his *Critique*, which Langbauer draws upon extensively to make her case, is difficult to comprehend because it is allusive rather than making things explicit.

²⁷ CEL 2, 65. The everyday is not simply sameness. Rather, according to Lefebvre, it can be viewed "as the place where repetition and creativity meet and confront each other," CEL 2, 239. Additionally, it has been noted that "[f]or Lefebvre, everyday life was not synonymous with banality or boredom." Derek Schilling, "French Sociologies of the Quotidian: From Dialectical Marxism to the Anthropology of Everyday Practice," In *Encountering the Everyday: an Introduction to the Sociologies of the Unnoticed*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 187.

²⁸ Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 12.

²⁹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, argue that Schopenhauer's philosophy depicts "the pendulum of life" as oscillating "between pain and boredom." *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 205. This is most likely a reference to the following passage by Schopenhauer: "There is not much to be got anywhere in the world; it is full of privation and pain and for those who have escaped there from boredom lurks at every corner." In "What a Man is," *Parerga and Paralipomena: Volume One* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 333.

Whereas it is well documented that Schopenhauer had severe disdain for women,³⁰ Langbauer is a proud feminist. Unfortunately, she depicts Lefebvre's position as being closer to Schopenhauer's than her own, which is simply not the case.³¹ This is emblematic of virtually all of Langbauer's various assessments of Lefebvre scattered throughout her book. One in particular, which should be apparent to anyone remotely familiar with Lefebvre's work is Langbauer's depiction of Lefebvre's position as structuralist. A Lefebvrian triad deserves attention at this point, that of structuralism-poststructuralism-anti-structuralism. Langbauer believes she identifies the rupture where, at one point, "with the introduction of the everyday, Lefebvre's structuralism becomes poststructuralism."³² Langbauer has, unfortunately, left out the third option in the above triad, anti-structuralism. Referring to Lefebvre's work as a form of "structuralism" is a significant departure from the majority of Lefebvre's commentators. There is a general consensus on this particular point. For example, the very first sentence from Virginia Blum and Heidi Nast's co-authored article on Lefebvre is: "Henri Lefebvre strongly opposed structuralisms of any sort."³³ As well, his former student Jean Baudrillard has made it clear regarding Lefebvre that "structuralism was his number one enemy."³⁴ Further, in a recent collection on Lefebvre, its editors note how "Lefebvre remained

³⁰ Simon Critchley sums up this point quite nicely stating: "Schopenhauer was a notorious misogynist." *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 175. Also, see Schopenhauer's "On Women," *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin), 85-88.

³¹ Lefebvre's view of women and the everyday is discussed in the third section of chapter 4.

³² Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life*, 19.

³³ Virginia Blum and Heidi Nast, "Where's the Difference?: The Heterosexualization of Alterity in Henri Lefebvre and Jacques Lacan," *Environment and Planning D* 14(5), (1996): 559-580.

³⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments: Conversations with François L'Yvonnet*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Routledge, 2004), 16. Mike Gane, a Baudrillard scholar, similarly remarked that Lefebvre was "very much an anti-structuralist thinker." In "Introduction," *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews*, ed. Mike Gane, (London: Routledge, 1993), 2.

unpopular for refusing to follow the fashions of structuralism, poststructuralism.”³⁵ By distancing himself from structuralism and its offshoots and subsequently facing the wrath for maintaining such a position, Lefebvre’s work fell on deaf ears, if it ever reached them at all. With this, it is difficult to comprehend how anyone could confuse Lefebvre’s position as resembling structuralism. Lefebvre himself writes that “the cutting-edge of knowledge operates far beyond structuralism. And has done for a long time.”³⁶

Finally, Langbauer characterizes Lefebvre’s position as a utopian one when she writes: “as Lefebvre suggests, utopically.”³⁷ This brings my critique of Langbauer’s interpretation of Lefebvre back to where it began. Recall, Langbauer admonishes Lefebvre as someone who characterizes the everyday as an intense atmosphere of boredom and desolation. This is odd considering she sees Lefebvre as a utopian. As was made clear in the introductory chapter, Lefebvre’s utopianism is highly nuanced. Virtually anticipating accusations such as this from Langbauer and her ilk, Lefebvre composed a short dialogue between himself and an imaginary interlocutor who charges Lefebvre with being an ‘utopist.’ To this, Lefebvre replies: “And why not? For me this term has no pejorative connotations...I am indeed a utopian...a partisan of possibilities. But then are we not all utopians, apart from you?”³⁸ To Lefebvre, most people are utopian, it is only those “not very interesting people [who] escape utopianism.”³⁹ Utopian is not here employed as a pejorative term, and it is actually something Lefebvre has in common with Langbauer, despite their differing accounts on everyday life.

³⁵ Stefan Kipfer et al., “On the Production of Henri Lefebvre,” *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 5.

³⁶ KW, 37. For an in-depth study of Lefebvre’s anti-structuralism, see Edith Kurzweil, “Henri Lefebvre: A Marxist Against Structuralism,” In *The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 57-85.

³⁷ Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life*, 22.

³⁸ ELMW, 192.

³⁹ WC, 151.

Intellectual Parallels

Having dealt with what Lefebvre is not in a general way, it is now appropriate to sketch some similarities with other theorists. The question arises: Where can one find parallels between Lefebvre's work and other intellectuals? As mentioned in the previous chapter, Andy Merrifield asserted that David Harvey was his "Anglo-Saxon soul mate," but Merrifield has also described a close, yet ultimately 'Faustian', relationship between Lefebvre and the Situationist International, specifically its leading figure, Guy Debord.⁴⁰ But the parallels do not stop there. Quite a few essays have been written comparing Lefebvre's work with other theorists, such as the Greek philosopher Kostas Axelos,⁴¹ French structuralist Roland Barthes,⁴² French philosopher Henri Bergson,⁴³ Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci,⁴⁴ French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan,⁴⁵ American pragmatist

⁴⁰ Andy Merrifield, "Lefebvre and Debord: a Faustian Fusion," *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 176-189. For Lefebvre's take on his strained relationship with the Situationists and Debord, see LEF.

⁴¹ Stuart Elden, "Mondialisation Before Globalization: Lefebvre and Axelos," *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 80-93.

⁴² See Michael Kelly, "Demystification: a Dialogue Between Barthes and Lefebvre," *Yale French Studies* 98 (2000): 79-97. For an actual dialogue between Barthes and Lefebvre, see "Fashion, a Strategy of Desire," In Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, trans. Andy Stafford and eds. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2006), 86-90.

⁴³ See Benjamin Fraser, "Toward a Philosophy of the Urban: Henri Lefebvre's Uncomfortable Application of Bergsonism," *Environment and Planning D* 26(2), (2008): 338-358. Interestingly, Andy Merrifield notes that Lefebvre constructed "a framework of historical duration from the standpoint of the moment – from, in other words, the exact opposite pole to Bergson's." He then summarizes Lefebvre's overall feelings for Bergson in one brief sentence: "Lefebvre hated Bergson's guts." *Henri Lefebvre*, 27.

⁴⁴ See two essays by Stefan Kipfer, "Urbanization, Everyday Life and the Survival of Capitalism: Lefebvre, Gramsci and the Problematic of Hegemony," *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 13(2), (June, 2002): 117-149; "How Lefebvre Urbanized Gramsci: Hegemony, Everyday Life, and Difference," *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 193-211.

⁴⁵ See Derek Gregory, "Lefebvre, Lacan and the Production of Space," In *Geography, History and Social Sciences*, eds. Georges B. Benko and Ulf Strohmayer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 15-44; Virginia Blum and Heidi Nast, "Where's the Difference?: The Heterosexualization of Alterity in Henri Lefebvre and Jacques Lacan," *Environment and Planning D* 14(5), (1996): 559-580. In their essay, "Lost in Transposition," Kofman and Lebas write that Lefebvre: "in particular poured scorn on Lacan whom he called an escroc (swindler) and a fumiste (not serious) because he dared speak about women, sex and the libido without knowing what he was talking about!", 29.

Charles Peirce,⁴⁶ French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre,⁴⁷ and the British cultural Marxist Raymond Williams.⁴⁸ While there may indeed be parallels between these figures and Lefebvre, this list does not exhaust the contours that are necessary for demonstrating Lefebvre's intellectual perspective, especially not in the case of his project of a critique of everyday life.

While the above-mentioned intellectuals are all fine company for anyone, Lefebvre's intellectual constellation was above all formed by three other key figures of Western thought: Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche.⁴⁹ It is perhaps not a stretch to say that Marx's influence looms much larger in Lefebvre's thought than the other two. If for many, Marx's thought stopped breathing in the nineteenth century as Michel Foucault has asserted,⁵⁰ it was certainly not the case for Lefebvre. The latter believed that "authentic Marxist thought has a *style*: the style of intensification and broadening of life. This style

⁴⁶ See Pentti Määttänen, "Semiotics of Space: Peirce and Lefebvre," *Semiotica* 166 (1/4), (2007): 453-461.

⁴⁷ See Michael Kelly, "Towards a Heuristic Method: Sartre and Lefebvre," *Sartre Studies International* 5(1), (1999): 1-15. This is an intriguing comparison, considering Lefebvre frequently criticized Sartre. For example, in the first volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre has this to say about his fellow French intellectual: "[R]eading Sartre is an increasingly cold, dry experience, overladen with falsely concrete details (noted down deliberately and consciously in order to be concrete!), without passion, without interest in life, without youth and without maturity, and quite simply boring." CEL 1, 236.

⁴⁸ Andrew Shmuely, "Totality, Hegemony, Difference: Henri Lefebvre and Raymond Williams," *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 212-230.

⁴⁹ In English translation, the most explicit example of the profound influence of these three thinkers on Lefebvre's thought and work can be found in Lefebvre's "Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche," KW, 42-49. Lefebvre would argue that these are three essential thinkers and a "[c]onfrontation of the theses and hypotheses of Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche is just beginning – and only with great difficulty at that." PS, 24. Despite his admiration for Nietzsche, Lefebvre claims that Nietzsche's concept of 'Grand Style' has nothing to do with his own concept of style, or, more precisely, the absence of style, a concept that will be dealt with below. In referring to 'style', Lefebvre argues that "we must discard Nietzschean theories, for our subject is more limited and precise." ELMW, 115.

⁵⁰ Foucault's actual line is: "Marxism exists in nineteenth-century thought like a fish in water: that is, it is unable to breathe anywhere else." *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), 285. Lefebvre seems to be alluding to Foucault's claim when he summarizes the general sentiment preceding the worker and student revolts of May 1968 in France when he writes: "In brief, Marxist thought is dated; it reflects the nineteenth century." EX, 11.

has been completely abandoned by today's 'Marxists'.⁵¹ It is worth keeping 'style' in mind, as it will resurface during part three of this chapter. A certain strand of Marxism, specifically Lefebvre's version, seems to be an authentic mode of thought which could potentially result in an authentic mode of living. Contained within a critique of contemporary society is the utopian longing for something else. This is above all else where Lefebvre takes his cue from Marx. But is Lefebvre too utopian for his own good?

There is a direct connection between Lefebvre's interest in Marx and boredom. Lefebvre held no illusions with the popularity of Marxism, noting "Marxism has become *boring*. It has been a disappointment; young people are disappointed with it because it bores them."⁵² With the rise of boredom with Marxism came the decline of its style. At best, Lefebvre would concede that Marxism was dying of boredom, but never that it was dead; there was always a glimmer of hope that it would resurface, or at least be partially alive despite its association with boredom. Elsewhere Lefebvre notes that "one cause of boredom for Marxists was and remains the fate of the work [*oeuvre*] and the concepts inherited from Marx and Engels."⁵³ His critique, then, can be viewed as an effort to revitalize Marx and make it interesting. How does he go about doing that? Ironically, Lefebvre went about this by studying what is boring, the mundane elements of society commonly associated with everyday life. In order to combat the boredom of Marxism, Lefebvre studied taken for granted, boring things. This is not that radical of a departure from some of Marx's own work, such as in the first volume of his *Capital* which features

⁵¹ IM, 140.

⁵² CEL 1, 84-85.

⁵³ SSW, 303.

chapters on the commodity, money, and the working day.⁵⁴ What could be more ordinary than those things?

Despite such parallels between Marx and Lefebvre, Lefebvre was criticized by some who felt he had deviated too far from the master's work. As Lefebvre puts it, "[t]o try to extricate the concept of the everyday, of everyday life does not enter precisely into the framework of what is called Marxism. And I've certainly been told that!"⁵⁵ It is perhaps best encapsulated by Harvey Molotch in his review of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* when he writes: "This is no ordinary Marxism."⁵⁶ If ordinary Marxism was what bored, Lefebvre would gladly break away from its intellectual framework erected and policed by other thinkers.

Lefebvre advocated reading Marx's work with fresh eyes instead of looking at it through someone else's eyes. For Lefebvre, whatever one hears about Marx should be immediately put into question. Writing in 1939, Lefebvre exclaimed that "the fact remains that today we can and must reread Marx with fresh eyes, especially the early works."⁵⁷ He continues on a little later in the same text by stating that "the early writing of Marx become of the first importance."⁵⁸ So what does this mean for his *Critique*? Lefebvre argues that "in order to understand the modern world, it is necessary not only to retain some of Marx's essential concepts but also to add new ones: the everyday day, the urban, social time and space, the tendency toward a state-oriented mode of production."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ These are the basic themes for chapters 1, 3, and 10, respectively, in *Capital: Volume 1* of the Penguin edition with the Ben Fowkes translation.

⁵⁵ ME, 23.

⁵⁶ Harvey Molotch, "The Space of Lefebvre," *Theory and Society* 22(6), (December, 1993): 890.

⁵⁷ DM, 5.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁹ TLCP, 77.

He thought Marxism was not a singular, monolithic entity, but was in fact plural.⁶⁰ There is and ought to be multiple variations of this school of thought. His version is consistent with some and radically different than others.

While discussing his version of Marxism, Lefebvre said he has “nothing in common with Lukács, but would be closer to Adorno.”⁶¹ While examining the parallels between Lefebvre and Lukács would be a fruitful endeavour, it is a project that falls well outside the scope of this dissertation. However, in the case of Adorno, it is worthwhile to ask, how is Lefebvre close to Adorno? In brief, both Adorno and Lefebvre were both 20th century thinkers that often employed constellations as a metaphor,⁶² both theorized and critiqued consumption,⁶³ they were both ardent proponents of dialectical thought, both were highly influenced by Marx, Hegel, and Nietzsche, and so on and so on. The commonalities and differences between these two thinkers could be explored in

⁶⁰ As Lefebvre himself notes, “[t]here is no Marxism; there are *several* Marxisms!” ME, 22. Elsewhere, Lefebvre argues “[t]here is not *one* Marxism but rather many Marxist tendencies, schools, trends, and research projects.” TLCP, 75. Ed Soja offers a useful description of Lefebvre’s Marxism as “intentionally incomplete, endlessly explorable, resistant to closure or easy categorical definition, but persistently faithful in spirit and intent to Marx.” *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 36. For present purposes, it is important to note that Fredric Jameson argues that: “The central Marxist figure in the analysis of daily life is, however, Henri Lefebvre, whose pioneering studies in this area date back to the immediate postwar years (1947) and seem to have emerged independently of the phenomenological tradition.” *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso Press, 2009), 347.

⁶¹ INT, 29. Lefebvre summarizes a key difference between the two thinkers with their interpretations of modernity: “If you believe the negative consists solely in the other, reverse side of the positive; and, consequently, that it creates nothing, since it can only dissolve and decompose the positive to create space for what is to come, then Lukács’s peremptory critique of modernity and modern art follows. If, on the other hand, you accept that the negative moment creates something new, that it summons and develops its seeds by dissolving what exists, then you will adopt Adorno’s position.” CEL 3, 49.

⁶² Stefan Kipfer believes Lefebvre’s use of ‘constellation’ to be “a more concretely lived, less galactic version” than Adorno’s. “Preface to the New Edition,” In DM, xxiv. On Adorno’s use of constellation, Susan Buck-Morss notes that he actually “brought it down to earth” from Walter Benjamin’s use of it. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 93. If Buck-Morss is taken seriously, it would seem as though Adorno’s usage of constellation is in fact ‘concretely lived’, and thus much closer to Lefebvre’s than Kipfer acknowledges.

⁶³ Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life*, 89.

numerous volumes.⁶⁴ For present purposes, it is worthwhile noting that in his preface to the first volume of Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, Michel Trebitsch writes that the "critique of everyday life is more of a prefigurement of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*."⁶⁵ One could also say that Lefebvre's term 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption' parallels Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the 'culture industry'.⁶⁶ In an essay on Lefebvre's aesthetics, Thomas Davis notes how Lefebvre's references to modern art and literature "bear more than a family resemblance to Adorno's writings on art and music."⁶⁷ In his commentary on Davis' essay, Ben Highmore, too, sees parallels between Adorno's negative dialectics and Lefebvre's critique.⁶⁸ One of Lefebvre's biographers, Rémi Hess, believed that Adorno was "incontestablement le philosophe allemand le plus proche de Lefebvre,"⁶⁹ which roughly translates to: "unquestionably, the German philosopher closest to Lefebvre" was Adorno.

One last point to be made is the similar assertions on realizing philosophy respectively made by both Lefebvre and Adorno. Here are two passages in succession by the two intellectuals that demonstrate the parallels. 1) Lefebvre writes: "Because of its

⁶⁴ While this dissertation will make considerable use of Adorno's work, especially in the final chapter, his oeuvre is far too complex and diverse to develop many of his intellectual parallels with Lefebvre in detail. Such a project falls well outside the scope of this dissertation. While certain continuities have been noted above, it must be acknowledged here that the discontinuous elements largely go unmentioned. As one example of a discontinuity, Lefebvre once wrote that he "cannot think exactly like those who were friends of Thomas Mann." TLCP, 76. Adorno was one such friend of Mann's. This is clear in their frequent exchange of letters. For this, see Adorno and Mann's *Correspondence: 1943-1955*, ed. Henri Lonitz (Malden, MA: Polity, 2006). Adorno would perhaps have argued that Lefebvre misunderstood Mann. As a friend, Adorno argued that Mann was not what he appeared on the surface: "What people hold against Thomas Mann, taking it for decadence, was its opposite, nature's capacity to be mindful of itself as something fragile. Humanness is none other than that." Adorno, "Toward a Portrait of Thomas Mann," *Notes to Literature, Volume Two*, 19.

⁶⁵ Michel Trebitsch, "Preface," CEL 1, xviii.

⁶⁶ This parallel will be explored further as the central theme of the fifth chapter in this dissertation.

⁶⁷ Thomas S. Davis, "What true project has been lost?: Modern Art and Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*," *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*, ed. Stephen Ross (London: Routledge, 2009), 66.

⁶⁸ Ben Highmore, "Disdained Everyday Fields: Response to Thomas S. Davis," In *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁹ Rémi Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du siècle* (Paris: Éditions A.M. Métailié, 1988), 308

failure to supersede itself by fulfilling itself – or by fulfilling the aims and aspirations of philosophers by superseding abstract philosophical thought – philosophy finds itself in a difficult situation. It goes on seesawing between system and experiment, between state ideology and anarchizing critique.”⁷⁰ 2) Adorno begins his *Negative Dialectics* in a similar manner by stating that “Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed.”⁷¹ The common thread between these two passages is the utopian potentiality of philosophy becoming fully lived, which has not yet happened, or may never happen. The source of inspiration for both theorists is Marx’s infamous 11th thesis on Feuerbach, part of Marx’s ‘early writings’: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.”⁷² Further to this, an echo of Lefebvre’s position to be outlined below can be found in Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* when he writes: “What the philosophers once knew as life has become the sphere of private existence and now of mere consumption, dragged along as an appendage of the process of material production, without autonomy or substance of its own.”⁷³ An emptiness, or absence in life, everyday life, seems to be an ever present reality for the two authors, and it is one brought on by the onset of modernity, or, as Adorno puts it above, by “the process of material production” commonly understood as

⁷⁰ CEL 2, 23.

⁷¹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 3. Lefebvre cites this passage approvingly in TLCP, 84.

⁷² Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 145. Writing directly about this passage, Lefebvre argues that philosophy is essential for changing the world. He writes: “Philosophers have interpreted the world: now it must be changed; can this change be accomplished without philosophy? No, because it consists in the practical realization of what philosophers have only thought of or represented: freedom, happiness, knowledge, joy.” KW, 202.

⁷³ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 15. On the same page, Adorno mentions that he is presenting a ‘melancholy science’, Ibid. Lefebvre refers to Adorno’s concept in the third volume of his *Critique* as follows: “The myth of transparency and its ideology end thus: the substitution of a melancholy science for lived experience and a gay science; the administration of daily life according to models, modes and modalities that are mimetically connected.” CEL 3, 161. Although only mentioned in passing, I argue that such an allusion is further evidence that a serious study of the parallels between Lefebvre and Adorno ought to be undertaken.

industrialization. To grasp the absence, it is important that the discussion now turns to what is present in everyday life.

Boredom-Modernity-Everyday Life

The conceptual triad of boredom-modernity-everyday life guides this section. In order to grasp the complexity of boredom and its relationship to modernity and everyday life, it would be beneficial to first articulate the relationship between modernity and everyday life. So, beginning with the latter two concepts, it must be asked again, what is the interrelationship between modernity and the everyday? In his book *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Lefebvre articulates the interrelationship as follows:

The quotidian is what is humble and solid, what is taken for granted and that of which all the parts follow each other in such a regular, unvarying succession that those concerned have no call to question their sequence; thus it is undated and (apparently) insignificant; though it occupies and preoccupies it is practically untellable, and it is the ethics underlying routine and the aesthetics of familiar settings. At this point it encounters the modern. This word stands for what is novel, brilliant, paradoxical and bears the imprint of technicality and worldliness; it is (apparently) daring and transitory, proclaims its initiative and is acclaimed for it; it is art and aestheticism – not readily discernible in so-called modern spectacles or in the spectacle of the modern world makes of itself to itself. The quotidian and the modern mark and mask, legitimate and counterbalance each other.⁷⁴

What has been missing from the conceptual triad of boredom-modernity-everyday life is the problematic concept of the postmodern. Although Lefebvre has made the connections between everyday life and modernity, how does he deal with those who argue we are in a new era of postmodernity?⁷⁵ To answer this question, Lefebvre begins by asking:

How can we avoid the conclusion that the alternative – modernity or

⁷⁴ ELMW, 24.

⁷⁵ Fredric Jameson makes the point that “[n]o ‘theory’ of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern.” *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso Press, 2002), 94.

postmodernity – is false? Posed in this way, the question avoids the main thing: technological modernism, its import, its capacity for intervention in daily life; and the related problem, which is simultaneously theoretical and political, of controlling technology. Meanwhile, daily life goes on.⁷⁶

While Lefebvre was skeptical of the postmodern as an era and a concept, there are several insights that can be gleaned from studies that use the postmodern as the point(s) of departure. For example, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner's trilogy on the postmodern is easily one of the most thorough studies available on the subject matter. Their work can be stitched at the end of some of Lefebvre's open threads of argumentation. The following passage from the first volume of the trilogy is an example of this.

Modernity entered everyday life through the dissemination of modern art, the products of consumer society, new technologies, and new modes of transportation and communication. The dynamics by which modernity produced a new industrial and colonial world can be described as 'modernization' – a term denoting those processes of individualization, secularization, industrialization, cultural differentiation, commodification, urbanization, bureaucratization, and rationalization which together have constituted the modern world.⁷⁷

This linking of modernity and everyday life by Best and Kellner can be grafted onto the following overview of what they call postmodern culture: "Within postmodern culture, subjects wear designer jeans or cruise the Internet hour after hour yet remain lonely and unhappy; the spectacle is ubiquitous, but people are still bored; everyday life is shit and people know it."⁷⁸ Whether labelled as modern or postmodern, one thing is clear: the everyday persists.

An important question to ask at this point is: What is the difference between life and everyday life in Lefebvre's thought? After all, as Lefebvre scholar Rob Shields puts

⁷⁶ CEL 3, 50. Despite his unwillingness to adopt postmodernity as a concept, Lefebvre theorized the "reign" of modernity, when its effects were most prevalent, as lasting from the beginning of the twentieth century up until the early 1980s. CEL 3, 46. With this, in Lefebvre's work there is the possibility of modernity's end.

⁷⁷ Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, 2-3.

⁷⁸ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner. *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), 116.

it in his book *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle*: “To criticise everyday life is to begin to theorise the complaint that ‘life is boring’.”⁷⁹ So is everyday life synonymous with life or is there a difference? To Lefebvre, “daily life does not exhaust lived experience, for there is lived experience outside it: above and/or below it.”⁸⁰ There are two ways to read this statement. The first is that those entrenched in the fabric of everyday life are thrown into exceptional events that transcend the dull horizon of the everyday and, therefore, there is more to life than everyday life. Tragedy falls outside the scope of the everyday. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 in the United States are examples of this.⁸¹ The everyday life of those people in the twin towers, along with countless other sympathetic people around the world, was shattered as the two planes smashed into the buildings.⁸² The second way to

⁷⁹ Shields, *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle*, 66.

⁸⁰ CEL 3, 11.

⁸¹ This event inaugurated what has come to be known as the ‘War on Terror’. Martin Amis has written that this event also inaugurated an intense and widespread boredom. Amis writes: “The age of terror, I suspect, will also be remembered as the age of boredom. Not the kind of boredom that afflicts the blasé and the effete, but a superboredom, rounding out and complementing the superterror of suicide-mass murder.” In “Terror and Boredom: The Dependent Mind,” *The Second Plane*, 76. Modern warfare has been linked with boredom before. For example, in a diary entry dated July 25th 1940, Virginia Woolf complains about the boredom of World War II. She writes: “This war inflicts boredom endlessly.” *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 5*, 305. Additionally, Jean Baudrillard has argued that the Gulf War “ended in general boredom” for those that followed it on television. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, 62. The boredom of war is not restricted to civilians. Lefebvre has noted how “there is a saying that army life is made up of a lot of boredom and a couple dangerous moments.” CEL 2, 42. For an in-depth examination of the long history of military boredom, see Bård Meland and Paul Otto Brunstad, *Enduring Military Boredom: From 1750 to the Present*.

⁸² For Lefebvre, tragic events such as this exit the everyday. He writes: “[t]he tragic is the non-everyday, the anti-everyday.” CEL 3, 172. Incidentally, Jean Baudrillard claims that the terrorists “used the banality of American everyday life as cover and camouflage” in order to perpetrate their crimes. *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso Press, 2003), 19. This particular book by Baudrillard is notable for the topic of boredom, although he does not use the word in it. Walter Kim’s *New York Times Book Review* essay discusses the plethora of books on the topic of 9/11 that were available shortly after the event took place, and midway through the review he singles out Baudrillard’s text. Kim writes: “First prize for cerebral cold-bloodedness goes to French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. ... It takes a rare, demonic genius to brush off the slaughter of thousands on the grounds that they were suffering from severe *ennui* brought about by boring modern architecture.” See his September 8th, 2002 review on page 7 of the *Times Review* Section titled “Notes on the Darkest Day: Book After Book Offers on the Terrain so Violently Altered on Sept. 11, 2001,” or see the back of Baudrillard’s book where the above quote is reproduced by the publisher in order to sell it! Of course, Baudrillard was not the first to link the Twin Towers with boredom. It may come as a surprise to Kim that a former employee of *The New York Times*, Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Goldberger, described the World Trade Center buildings in 1973 as “boring, so utterly banal as to be unworthy of a bank in Omaha.” Quoted in Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture*, 265.

read Lefebvre's claim that lived experience falls outside of everyday life is based on the concept of class. That is, those who live in squalor are below the level of the everyday, whereas billionaires who live on mounds of money do not have the same repetitive routines or schedules as those embedded in the everyday. The former are referred to as "rejects" that live at the level of "infra-daily life" whereas the latter "Olympians" live at the "supra-daily life" level.⁸³ Lefebvre's terminology here is used in a facetious manner. He neither lauds the Olympians nor does he deplore the rejects. With this, it appears that everyday life is, therefore, not all things to all people. Although, it should be highlighted that in the first volume of his *Critique* Lefebvre seems to equate "life as a whole" with everyday life.⁸⁴ The shift in perspective demonstrates the movement in Lefebvre's thought from the first volume of his *Critique* published in the 1940s to the third volume published in the 1980s. In summation, Lefebvre's evolved position on the pervasiveness on the everyday can be summarized in the following passage. Lefebvre writes: "Thus, there are countries and peoples, in the grip of deprivation and need, which must be said to exist 'short of' the everyday realm, because they can only *aspire* to a firmly grounded everyday life."⁸⁵

So what, then, is Lefebvre's general conception of everyday life? First, it should be mentioned that, according to Lefebvre, everyday life is the historically specific mode,

⁸³ CEL 3, 87. If broadly defined, the 'middle-class' is an appropriate term here. Although, this is not exact, as Lefebvre's work also applies to those traditionally referred to as 'working class'. In Lefebvre's formulation, the middle class are the people who are not exceedingly rich or devastatingly poor. The purest example for Lefebvre and his study of everyday life, however, is not the entire middle class, but "in the middle of this middle" class. CEL 3, 160. Regarding the middle-class and boredom, Erich Fromm asks some penetrating questions that mesh well with Lefebvre's work. Fromm asks: "Could it be that the middle-class life of prosperity, while satisfying our material needs leaves us with a feeling of intense boredom, and that suicide and alcoholism are pathological ways of escape from this boredom? Could it be [an] illustration for the truth of the statement that 'man lives not by bread alone,' and that [...] modern civilization fails to satisfy profound needs in man? If so, what are these needs?" *The Sane Society*, 10-11.

⁸⁴ CEL 1, 199.

⁸⁵ PS, 415.

or modes, of life produced and reproduced within the processes of modernity. That is, although there has always been ‘daily life’, the processes of modernity resulted in a new experience of time and space, with new routines, new technologies, a new emphasis on leisure, and therefore transformed daily life into everyday life. Lefebvre argues that

in industrial society, the everyday manifests itself as a discrete *level*. In previous societies, everyday life was incomparably more integrated into the culture as a whole – into religious life, for example; it was not separate from it. In our society there is an increasing disparity between the level of the everyday and higher levels – those of politics and the State, high technology, or high culture, for instance. The gap is widening and helps to define the everyday as such, as a level. Furthermore, at the same time as it is gradually becoming defined as a level, the everyday is spreading and leveling out throughout industrial society, in all countries, and in all the cultures that are subordinate to industrial society; and it is becoming uniform, in other words, defined.⁸⁶

Lefebvre uses a screen as a metaphor to illustrate the problematic. The everyday is a screen in both senses of the word in which it both conceals and reveals the modern world.⁸⁷

Quite generally, Lefebvre’s project was an attempt to decode the modern world via the concept of the everyday, or, keeping with the metaphor of the screen, to see what it shows as well as what it conceals. No small task by any stretch of the imagination, Lefebvre was not attempting to singlehandedly divulge the secrets of the world, he simply wanted to provide what he saw as a way in for not only himself but all of society. He lays out his object of analysis in the first volume of his *Critique* as follows:

Everyday life, in a sense residual, defined by ‘what is left over’ after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis, must be defined as a totality. Considered in their specialization and their technicality, superior activities leave a ‘technical vacuum’ between one another which is filled up by everyday life. Everyday life is profoundly related to *all* activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum

⁸⁶ KW, 100-101.

⁸⁷ TLCP, 78.

total of relations which make the human – and everyday human being – a whole takes its shape and its form.⁸⁸

This is an oft quoted passage that anyone familiar with the secondary literature on Lefebvre and/or everyday life will perhaps recognize.⁸⁹ Instead of tarrying too long on this well trodden ground, there are two issues in this passage that out to be highlighted: ‘totality’ and ‘what is left over’.

First, the concept of totality is strewn throughout Lefebvre’s work on everyday life.⁹⁰ It is something that Lefebvre felt could never be grasped by a single discipline (or person), as they isolated facts and inevitably blurred the concept of totality. Along the lines of Clifford Geertz, Lefebvre advocated a ‘blurring of genres’⁹¹ to confront the totality of everyday life. Although, it should be mentioned, utilizing a complex concept such as totality was no guarantee for making everyday life any clearer or simpler. Rather, totality is the virtually unattainable goal that presents almost “insurmountable difficulties.”⁹² It is akin to reaching for the stars knowing full well that one would most likely never be able to touch them. It was simply a concept that Lefebvre thought we could not do without⁹³ and attempting to confront it is a necessary part of understanding everyday life in the modern world.

⁸⁸ CEL 1, 97.

⁸⁹ See Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life*, 79; Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 115; Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, 68; Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso Press, 1995), 191-192; Mark Poster, “Everyday (Virtual) Life,” *New Literary History* 33(4), (Autumn, 2002): 745.

⁹⁰ Martin Jay’s book *Marxism & Totality* features a chapter on surrealism and Lefebvre’s use of the term ‘totality’. However, Jay pays scant attention to Lefebvre and instead focuses on surrealism and other authors. See chapter 9 in Jay’s *Marxism & Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 276-299.

⁹¹ See Clifford Geertz, “Blurring Genres: the Refiguration of Social Thought,” *Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the Literature*, ed. William H. Newell (New York: The College Board, 1998), 225-237.

⁹² CEL 2, 186.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 180.

Second, there is the related issue of what is ‘left over’. This is a key aspect of whether one buys in to studying everyday life, or whether everyday life is relegated to the dustbin of scholarship. There are essentially three perspectives on this matter. To a metaphysician everything is left over and this concept lacks precision. To positivists or scientists, nothing, or virtually nothing, is left over as everything is already accounted for. To Lefebvre and those who accept everyday life as a concept, there is simply *something* left.⁹⁴ Is Lefebvre promoting an elitist view where he and similar thinkers are alone in seeing the world as it really is? No, Lefebvre was clear in his work that he did not see people as ignorant to everyday life, but were much closer to being indifferent.⁹⁵ Everyday people, or ordinary people,⁹⁶ are all too aware of their mundane routines, but do not reflect in depth on what they are or why they came about. Most people simply do not have the time to formulate a well documented, well researched critique. Then again, perhaps they do have the time, but they choose to fill their blocks of leisure time with other things. Adorno would certainly disagree that people can freely choose what to do with their free time. He writes: “If people were able to make their own decisions about

⁹⁴ Ibid., 46-47.

⁹⁵ Lefebvre attributes this indifference towards the everyday to the everyday itself. He writes: “Habit and familiarity gradually dull our curiosity and bring, not peace, but a comforting indifference.” CEL 1, 243. Further to this point of indifference and not ignorance, elsewhere Lefebvre states that “People today are no longer ignorant of the society in which they live. They have an awareness of many of its detours and tricks, even when they do not see the exact mechanisms of exploitation and the means of power. They have known for a long time that it is a case of ‘them and us’, and that ‘them’ are getting fatter all the time.” SC, 20.

⁹⁶ ‘Everyday’ and ‘ordinary’ are used interchangeably here following Liesl Olson who claims that continental thinkers (especially French) use the term ‘everyday’, whereas analytic thinkers (such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, and Stanley Cavell) use the term ‘ordinary’. Despite the differences between these traditions and thinkers, the two terms are, nevertheless, “closely connected concepts.” *Modernism and the Ordinary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 163. The two terms have been used interchangeably for Lefebvre’s work. For example, Lefebvre being one of the great continental thinkers of the ‘everyday’, it is worth noting that Michael Gardiner’s chapter on Lefebvre is titled ‘Henri Lefebvre: Philosopher of the Ordinary’. See chapter 4 in Gardiner’s *Critiques*, 71-101.

themselves and their lives, if they were not caught up in the realm of the eversame, they would not have to be bored. Boredom is the reflection of objective dullness.”⁹⁷

Critiquing everyday life does not “make life’s problems any simpler,”⁹⁸ but Lefebvre would argue it is a step in the right direction. Lefebvre articulated the necessity for an integrative approach by illustrating the complexity of the modern world with the following passage: “The human world is not defined simply by the historical, by culture, by totality or society as a whole, or by ideological and political superstructures. It is defined by this intermediate and mediating *level*: everyday life.”⁹⁹ He drew upon diverse sources such as the films of Charlie Chaplin, the theatre of Bertolt Brecht, novels like James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, daily newspapers both local and international, magazines (most notably *Elle* magazine which helped initiate the study of everyday life), commodities such as dish soap, the physical landscape, and many others. These can be “everyday facts such as furniture, objects and the world of objects, time-tables, news items, advertisements,”¹⁰⁰ etc. With this, Lefebvre demonstrated that the study of everyday life is not only about examining what is on the margins, or minor works in comparison to major works, but it is also about studying the minor in major works. Perhaps most importantly, Lefebvre offers a utopian longing for change throughout his academic work, as he believes “[t]o study the everyday is to wish to change it.”¹⁰¹

Ulysses

Keeping with one of the major works highlighted above, the perennial example of the everyday for Lefebvre is none other than what Marshall Berman refers to as “the

⁹⁷ Adorno, “Free Time,” 192.

⁹⁸ CEL 1, 83.

⁹⁹ CEL 2, 45.

¹⁰⁰ ELMW, 27.

¹⁰¹ CEL 2, 226.

archetypal modernist book,”¹⁰² James Joyce’s novel *Ulysses*. There is a great affinity between an incredibly detailed novel and the vastness of everyday life. To Lefebvre, “[t]he novel accepts the everyday; it narrates it.”¹⁰³ There is no surprise, then, that Lefebvre used a novel as the epitome of everyday life. To Lefebvre, Joyce’s canonical text is not only the archetypal book of modernity, but it is also the archetypal book of everyday life. In the first volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre describes Joyce’s masterpiece as follows: “*Ulysses* demonstrates that a great novel can be boring. And ‘profoundly’ boring. Joyce nevertheless understood one thing: that the report of a day in the life of an ordinary man had to be predominantly in the epic mode.”¹⁰⁴ Here the conceptual triad of boredom-modernity-everyday life that made its debut at the beginning of this chapter takes shape. In another text, Lefebvre writes that in *Ulysses* “the quotidian steals the show.”¹⁰⁵ In yet another text, Lefebvre emphasizes Joyce’s impact on his home country of France: “Joyce, an Irish writer who had enormous influence in France, really established the idea of daily life in literature. *Ulysses* is twenty-four hours in the life of an ordinary. Many writers call themselves existentialists, but in reality they are

¹⁰² Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, 31. But what is meant by ‘modernist’ book? Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane have articulated the basic features of modernist books, which appear to fit with Berman’s use of the term. “The Modernist novel has shown, perhaps, four great preoccupations: with the complexities of its own form, with the representation of inward states of consciousness, with a sense of nihilistic disorder behind the ordered surface of life and reality, and with the freeing of narrative art from the determination of an onerous plot.” In “The Modernist Novel,” in *Modernism: 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), 393.

¹⁰³ IM, 175. This can be contrasted with Harvie Ferguson’s claim that “[t]he diary is the literary form of everydayness.” *Self-Identity and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2009), 164.

¹⁰⁴ CEL 1, 27. At the beginning of *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Lefebvre, again, links *Ulysses* with boredom, despite being the most important literary work on everyday life. In his analysis of *Ulysses* an imaginary interlocutor interrupts and asks, “Why must you go and choose an author whose work meanders through an impenetrable atmosphere of supreme boredom?” ELMW, 6. For Lefebvre, boredom is an essential component of the everyday, and Joyce would be remiss to not create such an atmosphere if he sought to depict the material conditions of actually existing everyday life.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 3.

continuing Joyce's exploration of the everyday."¹⁰⁶ Further to this point, Fredric Jameson has argued that "in *Ulysses* Joyce invented the single day as a new category of lived experience."¹⁰⁷

How is it so that one of *the* most important modernist books is profoundly boring? Bertrand Russell has noted that "all the best novels contain boring passages,"¹⁰⁸ but select passages are a far cry from the scope of an entire book, especially one as lengthy as *Ulysses*. The German philosopher Novalis once argued "many books are longer than they seem. They have indeed no end. The boredom that they cause is truly absolute and infinite."¹⁰⁹ This is all fine and good for an amateur novelist who gives his or her 'magnum opus' to anyone and everyone that he or she can persuade into reading it, but we are talking about James Joyce here.¹¹⁰ Are there others who share Lefebvre's belief that *Ulysses* is profoundly boring? Somewhat surprisingly, the answer is yes. Joyce scholar John Nash argues that "boredom might be thought of as one of the conditions of Joyce's Dublin."¹¹¹ Boredom, then, as a condition of Dublin, is no minor phenomenon. It may appear as such since the actual word 'boredom' is not used in the book. Perhaps this is why, following Jonathan Culler's line of argumentation, overall, critical discussions about literary works regarding this particular phenomenon are sorely lacking.

¹⁰⁶ TLCP, 79.

¹⁰⁷ Fredric Jameson, "Joyce or Proust," *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso Press, 2007), 179.

¹⁰⁸ Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 42.

¹¹⁰ Interestingly enough, Joyce claimed he "never met a bore." Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 5. Perhaps this is why he was able to create a 'profoundly boring' novel, since the most ordinary and banal details did not bore him. What so many others would find boring, Joyce found to be interesting. Such a perspective is a significant departure from Kierkegaard's assertion that "all men are bores," mentioned in the introductory chapter.

¹¹¹ John Nash, *James Joyce and the Act of Reception: Reading, Ireland, Modernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30.

[T]he concept of boredom is as frequent in the experience of reading major works as it is infrequent in the critical discussions of them. Or, at least, when critics do use it, it becomes an empty gesture of rejection. But boredom is a literary category of the first importance; it is the background against which the activity of reading takes place and which continually threatens to engulf it. The strategies of reading and interpretation must be understood as attempts to avoid boredom, and, on the other hand, boredom itself is a literary device whose usefulness modern literature has increasingly forced us to appreciate. To recognize the potential sources of boredom in a work and the different rhythms of reading which can be used to neutralize them is to discover important facts about its structure.¹¹²

Clearly, with books such as Spacks's *Boredom: the Literary History of a State of Mind*, acknowledging boredom in literary works has changed since 1977 when Culler penned the above passage.¹¹³ With this, even the most noteworthy of literature can be considered boring.

While discussing important literary works, Fredric Jameson recounts a brief conversation he had with a fellow author from China. "As Deng You-mei, one of the most interesting Chinese writers, said to me: 'We are not much interested in Western modernism as such. We are bored by novels that don't tell stories.' In other words, the elaborate symbolism you find in James Joyce or Virginia Woolf doesn't do anything for them."¹¹⁴ But are these two perspectives mutually exclusive? Can a novel be both boring and full of elaborate symbolism at the same time? It would appear that Jameson has already answered this question in his essay 'Ulysses in History'. In the first paragraph of the essay, Jameson explains the relationship between *Ulysses* and boredom:

I had it in mind, in what follows, to say something about the two most boring chapters of *Ulysses*: most people would agree that these are surely the Eumaeus

¹¹² Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (London: Paul Elek, 2007), 19.

¹¹³ Recently, two other works have emerged linking boredom and literature. See Lee Anna Maynard, *Beautiful Boredom: Idleness and Feminine Self-Realization in the Victorian Novel* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009) and Daniel Paliwoda, *Melville and the Theme of Boredom* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010). It is interesting to note that the same publisher is responsible for producing these two works.

¹¹⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Jameson on Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism*, ed. Ian Buchanan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 67.

and the Ithaca chapters, the scene in the cabmen's shelter and the catechism. I have found, however, that in order to do that properly one must necessarily speak about the rest in some detail so that finally those parts are greatly reduced. One of the things such a subject leads you to consider, however, is boredom itself and its proper use when we are dealing with literary texts of this kind, and in particular the classical texts of high modernism or even postmodernism [...] I think there is a productive use of such boredom, which tells us something interesting about ourselves as well as about the world in which we live today – but I also mean to use this word in a far less positive sense, so I will do that first and say that if there are boring chapters of *Ulysses*, with which we must somehow learn to live, there are also boring interpretations of *Ulysses*, and those we can really make an effort to do without, sixty years after its publication, and in a social and global situation so radically different from that in which the canonical readings of this text were invented.¹¹⁵

Perhaps one can infer from Jameson's dismissal of boring interpretations of *Ulysses* as being characterized by those who fail to see the boredom in it. Referring to James Joyce's *Ulysses* as boring is only scandalous if boredom is viewed as a superficial experience, unworthy of attention, consideration, or extended reflection.

In her book *Modernism and the Ordinary*, Liesl Olson begins her chapter on Joyce by saying “[t]o explore how the ordinary functions in literary modernism without examining *Ulysses* would be like describing the weather outside without noting the temperature.”¹¹⁶ The point to be emphasized here is that the lofty status of Joyce's book is not in question; rather, the ordinary becomes extraordinary in this work, which is undoubtedly why Lefebvre frequently employed it as an example. Jameson, too, believes that “boredom is not Joyce's failure, then, but rather his success, and is the signal whereby we ourselves as organisms register a situation but also forms that are finally

¹¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, “*Ulysses* in History,” *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso Press, 2007), 137.

¹¹⁶ Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33. While this book is an excellent study of modernist novels, it should be mentioned that Olson's limited analysis of Lefebvre is fraught with claims with which I do not agree. Perhaps this is the case because Olson chiefly relies upon Langbauer's interpretation of Lefebvre.

stifling for us.”¹¹⁷ Evidently, Joyce was not alone with this literary technique, as some of his fellow writers, too, utilized an atmosphere of boredom in their novels as Joe Moran makes clear:

Modernist classics like James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) also use the structure of a single day in a modern city to juxtapose the profound and the banal, the weightiest matters of life and death with the most trivial quotidian detail. All these books use chronology as a great leveller, a way of deferring the question of whether these familiar activities are significant enough to write about. In the structure of a single day, everything receives roughly the same amount of attention – however dull or boring it might at first seem.¹¹⁸

Further to this point, Susan Sontag argues that “[w]e should acknowledge certain uses of boredom as one of the most creative stylistic features of modern literature.”¹¹⁹ With this, it would seem that creating an atmosphere of boredom is a highly skilled endeavour. The immense effort it takes to properly articulate the depth and pervasiveness of everyday life should not go unrecognized.

At the same time, however, it seems to be fairly easy to make something boring. As mentioned above, amateur novelists around the world bore their relatives and coworkers all the time with their dull and repetitive stories. It would seem appropriate, then, to differentiate between a work that intends demonstrate boredom and others that are boring despite their best efforts. Perhaps it goes without saying, but there are those who firmly believe boredom is literature’s enemy.

If the reader were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us. A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is

¹¹⁷ Jameson, “*Ulysses* in History,” 149.

¹¹⁸ Joe Moran, *Queuing for Beginners: The Story of Daily Life from Breakfast to Bedtime* (London: Profile Books, 2007), 6.

¹¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), 68.

only a pleasure when it is active and creative. In this process of creativity, the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far, so we may say that boredom and overstrain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play.¹²⁰

The Argentine writer Marcos Aguinis would surely disagree with the usefulness of boredom for literature. Speaking about the writing process (specifically the myriad changes employed throughout his works), he says: “When I am asked about it, I say that I change characters and scenes for reasons of courtesy, so as not to bore my reader. But if I dare to confess the truth, I say that I do it so I don’t bore myself. Boredom, in my judgment, is the worst of all sins.”¹²¹ Setting aside Aguinis’s assertion of boredom as a sin, which the first chapter attempted to debunk as a possibility, Aguinis makes a fairly salient point. After all, who picks up a novel to be bored? One usually picks up a novel to stave off boredom, not induce it. Recall the gentleman mentioned in the first chapter who carries a book with him wherever he goes so he does not have to face boredom.

As for Lefebvre’s assertion that *Ulysses* is ‘profoundly boring’ in the first volume of his *Critique*, it is important to note that with the next line the text abruptly shifts to another topic. In the very next paragraph Lefebvre moves on to discuss Anglo-Saxon humour. Why does humour follow boredom here? And why is it specifically Anglo-Saxon humour? Granted, this may appear to be a bit of a non-sequitur, but when read alongside a passage from his book *Introduction to Modernity*, the transition becomes clear.

Irony and humour are close neighbours, but they should not be confused. The Anglo-Saxons have a humorous vision of that enormous ennui which

¹²⁰ Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” *New Literary History* 3(2), (Winter, 1972): 280.

¹²¹ Marcos Aguinis, “Boredom Is the Worst of the Sins.” *King David’s Harp: Autobiographical Essays by Jewish Latin American Writers*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Sadow (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 36.

characterizes their social life, and which raises fears for the future of ‘industrial society’. They need this sense of humour; it makes the boredom bearable. Humour can soften a situation, then go on its way. Humour manages to metamorphose the ennui of everyday life – almost. It may fail to transform it completely, but it makes it more decorative, and so henceforth the man who is bored can at least find his boredom enjoyable. He lives a life of well-being without pressing problems and devoid of all romance, and he cannot decide whether to feel comfortable or merely bored, a dilemma for which humour offers him a kind of solution. In any sociology of boredom, the study of Anglo-Saxon humour would bulk large. Humour resolves the conflictual situation, though the resolution is not a lasting one. Irony, of course, would emphasize it. It would reveal the appalling state of all those decent folk who have every reason to be happy (comfort, a multiplicity of satisfactions), who are not only bored but also acutely aware that it is unfair that they should be so.¹²²

This passage gives insight into both boredom and, I believe, Lefebvre’s writing style.¹²³

In the foreword to the English translation of Lefebvre’s book *The Urban Revolution* Neil Smith suggests that Lefebvre’s style is like a “stream of philosophical consciousness.”¹²⁴

Albeit without explicitly stating so, it seems as though Smith is likening Lefebvre’s philosophizing to Molly Bloom’s stream of consciousness narrative at the end of *Ulysses*.

Although Smith believes Lefebvre “rarely if ever provides a linear argument,” Smith acknowledges that there is a “larger picture” at work.¹²⁵ As mentioned above, the first volume of Lefebvre’s *Critique* is “allusive.” When fragments are culled together from

¹²² IM, 8. One example of the relationship between Anglo-Saxon humour and boredom can be found in an interview with the American comedian Will Ferrell in reference to his childhood. “Growing up in suburbia, in safe, master-planned Irvine, there was no drama so we had to create it in our heads. My main form of entertainment was cracking my friends up and exploring new ways of being funny. I didn’t have to have the survival mode instinct like other comics, who grew up in tough neighborhoods. I had the opposite. For me, I grew up in Mayberry, and the humor broke the boredom.” Barry Koltnow, “Birth of a Clown: Will Ferrell discusses how his O.C. upbringing helped make him funny,” *The Orange County Register*, July 25, 2008. Ferrell sketches the intertwinement of suburbia and boredom, as well as humour as an important third term. As for the relationship between humour and everyday life, Lefebvre argues that the former often veils the problems of the latter. It is a type of coping mechanism employed in order to escape the difficult task of contemplating what one’s everyday life is all about. He explains as follows: “Humour lightens daily life; it takes it lightly; it makes possible a discourse that can consent without capitulating. For humour accepts things: more precisely, it accepts the situation by veiling it, by sometimes covering it with a kind of affection, by remaining within it.” CEL 3, 64.

¹²³ As mentioned in the introductory chapter, threads that seem to get dropped are often picked up later in the same work, or other works. Perhaps this occurs because many of Lefebvre’s books were dictated and were thus much more fluid and dynamic than writing by hand can be. Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre*, xxii.

¹²⁴ Neil Smith, “Foreword,” In UR, xxii.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

his writings, allusive passages become sharper and clearer. When assembled, the fragments may still appear as ‘allusive’, but not ‘elusive’. The link between Anglo-Saxon humour and boredom appears elsewhere in his work in a similarly random way:

Today there are so many worlds in the world that one more won’t make a difference, so I’ll add another, the world of respect: the world of state and of bureaucrats who cannot stand irony, the world of being ‘decent’, which turns a blind eye to public or private immorality. And it’s nothing new. Moralism, the moralism of moral order, has always gone hand in hand with immoralism. Being ‘decent’ as a general and generally accepted virtue has always gone side by side with cynicism as a type of general reality and consciousness. The one disguises the other, completing it, making it bearable. Will cynicism one day become the humour of this ‘decent’ society? Will we treat our po-faced ‘decency’ in the same way as the Anglo-Saxons deal with their traditional boredom? Could that be the road we will travel, the French road to ennui?¹²⁶

Before one can travel on the road to ennui, it first and foremost has to be produced. But why does boredom persist when there are so many things that combat it? As Lefebvre noted, Anglo-Saxon humour is only a temporary relief from the boredom of everyday life. The same temporary relief, though helpful in living one’s life, masks the deeper issue of an absence of style in the everyday.

The Erosion of Style in Everyday Life

As was mentioned above, and denoted by the title of this chapter, style is important to Lefebvre as far as the study of everyday life is concerned, but it is absolutely essential for understanding his fragmented theory of boredom.¹²⁷ Style is here not simply meant in the sense of designer clothes, fast cars, or expensive homes, but in the sense of

¹²⁶ IM, 35.

¹²⁷ In an interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy, Lefebvre was described as both “clearly bored at having to answer [Lévy’s] questions” but Lévy had to “admit that he also did it with skill and with *style*.” In Bernard-Henri Lévy, “A Group of Young Philosophers: a Conversation with Henri Lefebvre,” *Adventures on the Freedom Road: The French Intellectuals in the 20th Century*, trans. and ed. Richard Veasey, (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 131. (my italics)

the totality of everyday life.¹²⁸ These items are, nevertheless, essential components for understanding the distinction between what people are looking for and what they get, which is, at its roots, the distinction between style and mass culture.

Throughout everyday life in the modern world, through leisure activities and routines, people seek a style of living that is ultimately shrouded by mass culture. Under the guise of style, mass culture comes to dominate and colonise everyday life. This, it is argued, occurs beneath the attention of consumers despite their best intentions. As Lefebvre puts it, “leisure involves an original search – whether clumsy or skilful is unimportant – for a style of living. And perhaps for an art of living, for a kind of happiness.”¹²⁹ Temporary happiness may be achieved, yet the eternal happiness promised by mass culture conversely offers but a fleeting satisfaction despite the promise of a unique style of life. Lefebvre argues that “[s]tyle has degenerated into culture – subdivided into everyday culture for the masses and higher culture.”¹³⁰ The basic definition of style can be found in the third volume of his *Critique* where he writes: “The term ‘style’ refers to an aesthetic or ethical bearing in which the middle classes are

¹²⁸ Arthur Miller acknowledges the importance of analyzing ‘style of life’ and offers a theory for why it is taken for granted amongst the general public. He notes “there is still a distance to go before life’s style matters very much to most of humanity in comparison with next month’s rent.” In “The Bored and the Violent,” *Echoes Down the Corridor: Collected Essays 1944-2000* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 60. Miller’s explanation for the inattention regarding style of life can be contrasted with that of Stuart Ewen who believes style of life is an important aspiration for many: “If style constitutes a presentation of a way of life, it is a way of life which is unattainable for most, nearly all, people. Yet this doesn’t mean that style isn’t relevant to most people. It is very relevant. It is the most common realm of our society in which the need for a better way of life is acknowledged on a material level, if not met. It constitutes a politics of change, albeit a ‘change’ that resides on the surfaces of things. If the ‘life-style’ of style is not realizable, it is, at the same time, the most constantly available lexicon from which many of us draw the visual grammar of our lives. It is a behavioural model that is closely interwoven with modern patterns of survival and desire. It is a ‘hard to define...but easy to recognize’ piece within our current history.” Stuart Ewen, “Marketing Dreams: The Political Elements of Style,” In *Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketing, Meanings, and the Packaging of Pleasure*, ed. Alan Tomlinson (London: Routledge, 1990), 42-43.

¹²⁹ CEL 1, 42.

¹³⁰ ELMW, 36.

precisely lacking. As for lifestyle, it is easily defined: it is the everyday itself.”¹³¹

The longing for a style of life permeates all of Lefebvre’s writings on everyday life, and in many other places as well. It is a recurring, persistent concern for Lefebvre not only as a theoretical exercise, but, more importantly, as a vital component for the practical revolution of everyday life. To demonstrate its ubiquity in his writings, consider the following four passages from four different texts written by Lefebvre:

In ancient societies, one ate, one drank, one worked; there were houses, streets and rooms, pieces of furniture, useful objects, instruments and other things. Yet there was not ‘everydayness’. In the unity of ethics and aesthetics, or practice and knowledge, in a *style*, the contemporary levels [*la superposition actuelle*] of the everyday and ‘culture’ (high, medium, low) had neither reason, nor sense [*n’avait ni raison, ni sens*].¹³²

Once upon a time there was a sad, restricted, oppressed existence. The land divided into a thousand and one domains, was ruled by King God and Queen Death. Yet derelict and oppressed as it was, the existence never lacked style; basically religious or metaphysical (does the basic ideology matter?), style reigned and permeated every aspect.... Were we to continue this story we would see that these people lived in extreme poverty but were nevertheless snug and warm.¹³³

More generally, in so far as ‘modernity’ is part and parcel of economic or technological growth and the processes of accumulation, it cannot produce a style. Instead it spends its time struggling against the boredom of the absence of style, or trying to turn the clock back, exhuming old styles, myths and symbols from a pre-capitalist past.¹³⁴

Is this a lifestyle, or is it life unequivocally stripped of all style? Although we would tend towards the second of these hypotheses, it is still too early to reach a decision; scrutiny of these hypotheses and this problem is part of the *sociology of boredom*...¹³⁵

These four passages mark a shift from pre-modern times to modernity. The common thread implicitly running throughout is the search for a style of life. Lars Svendsen notes

¹³¹ CEL 3, 160.

¹³² Quoted in Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 117.

¹³³ ELMW, 75-76.

¹³⁴ IM, 92-93.

¹³⁵ CEL 2, 92-93.

that searching for a style of life is a replacement for old traditions.

A central motif in modernity is the liberation from tradition. Traditions have been replaced by lifestyles. The concept of a lifestyle sounds trivial, but it is crucial for understanding modern life. A lifestyle is essentially a set of practices maintained for a period of time. Modern man must choose a lifestyle, but, as it is based on a choice, one can simply choose to replace one lifestyle by another.¹³⁶

Aside from being a persistent thought for Lefebvre, what can be gleaned from these four passages that share the common thread of an absence of style in everyday life? First, it is clear that style once existed. In pre-modern times there was an abundance of style in life. This was before capitalism and therefore before modernity. With the advent of modernity, style of life dwindled and in its place what has come to be known as everyday life, that is, in its modern sense, began to take shape.

Before the series of revolutions which ushered in what is called the modern era, housing, modes of dress, eating and drinking – in short, living – presented a prodigious diversity. Not subordinate to any one system, living varied according to region and country, levels and classes of the population, available resources, season, climate, profession, age, and sex. This diversity has never been well acknowledged or recognized as such; it has resisted a rational kind of interpretation which has only come about in our time by interfering with and destroying that diversity. Today we see a worldwide tendency to uniformity. Rationality dominates, accompanied but not diversified by irrationality; signs, rational in their way, are attached to things in order to convey the prestige of their possessors and their place in the hierarchy.¹³⁷

The withering away of style in life brings with it a quest for a style as well. This is a dialectical movement. With the absence of style emerges the experience of boredom and the quest for style brings with it a temporary solution. For Lefebvre, permanent solutions can be had, but they require a revolution in everyday life. A revolution is here meant as a radical change, as opposed to a slight shift, which can only be referred to as a reform.

¹³⁶ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 79-80.

¹³⁷ EE, 7. But is Lefebvre here idealizing this past? This is only the case if he wishes to be ruled by 'King God' and 'Queen Death' and return to their oppression. I argue that he does not idealize the past, but simply wishes to retain a select few of its aspects.

In the first volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre proclaimed that everyday life “should become a work of art.”¹³⁸ At first glance, this appears to be a fairly simple proclamation. But what does Lefebvre mean by this phrase ‘make life a work of art’? Why the poetics? What Lefebvre is referring to is the widespread inability in the modern world to make life a work of art. Lefebvre’s utopian longing for everyday life as a work of art is consistent with this. What better way to live one’s life than as a work of art? To understand what Lefebvre means by this poetic phrase, a distinction must be made between his use of the term ‘work’ and his use of the term ‘product’. Combined, these two concepts constitute “the human world” in Lefebvre’s work.¹³⁹ Lefebvre distinguishes them by noting “whereas a work has something irreplaceable and unique about it, a product can be reproduced exactly, and is in fact the result of repetitive acts and gestures.”¹⁴⁰ Further, a work is “unique, original, and primordial.”¹⁴¹ As Lefebvre himself notes, “[f]or many people, to describe something as a work of art is simply the highest praise imaginable.”¹⁴² It is important to keep in mind, however, that there is the “prospect of discovering a dialectical relationship in which works are in a sense inherent in products, while products do not press all creativity into the service of repetition.”¹⁴³ Style of life, then, at least to Lefebvre, entails the transformation of everyday life into a work of art.

It is somewhat odd to claim the absence of style in everyday life. After all, style abounds in virtually every aspect of everyday life. With the proliferation of websites, magazines, television programs, and newspaper columns that flood everyday life, all of

¹³⁸ CEL 1, 199. Lefebvre’s proclamation can be contrasted with Liesl Olson, who writes: “But of course, art and life can never be the same.” Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 148.

¹³⁹ CEL 1, 96.

¹⁴⁰ PS, 70.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴² Ibid., 74.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 77.

which instruct one on the appropriate style of life, it seems crucial to scrutinize these representations and whether they truly offer styles of life or whether they represent their opposite, an absence of style. From magazines and websites to the billboards at the side of the highway and the television shows - even a television channel¹⁴⁴ – if anything, style seems to be omnipresent rather than absent. Lefebvre argues his case as follows:

Magazines and weeklies, particularly those directed at women and even those that defined the ‘cause of women’, work out complete daily schedules – buying and selling, shopping, menus, clothing. From morning to evening and evening to morning, everyday time is full to bursting: fulfilment, plenitude. With ‘values’ – femininity, virility, or seductiveness – but above all with the ultimate value: satisfaction. Being satisfied: this is the general model of being and living whose promoters and supporters do not appreciate the fact that it generates discontent. For the quest for satisfaction and the fact of *being satisfied* presuppose the fragmentation of ‘being’ into activities, intentions, needs, all of them well-defined, isolated, separable and separated from the Whole. Is this an art of living? A style? No. It is merely the result and the application to daily life of a management technique and a positive knowledge directed by market research. The economic prevails even in a domain that seemed to elude it: it governs lived experience.¹⁴⁵

With Lefebvre being an ardent proponent of the dialect, his method of analysis often involved seeing a surface masking its opposite. If style is to be found, it is not lurking in the pages of a style magazine or the flickering images of a television show that claims style as its own.

Lefebvre’s dialectical theorization of the absence of style amongst style is part of his much more general view of modernity. Lefebvre argues that “[t]he most extraordinary things are also the most everyday; the strangest things are often the most trivial.”¹⁴⁶ With this, he is essentially suggesting the ordinary lurking in the extraordinary and the extraordinary hiding in the ordinary. As an example of everydayness we can here

¹⁴⁴ The television channel in question is simply called ‘Style’.

¹⁴⁵ CEL 3, 81-82.

¹⁴⁶ CEL 1, 13.

take a newspaper or cable news program as a mysterious yet mundane daily activity for readers and/or viewers. What is so mysterious is the utter lack of the daily in daily news. As Lefebvre's old friend Georges Perec would say, "The daily papers talk of everything except the daily."¹⁴⁷ It is as though they are constructed in order to escape the everyday. If they brought readers closer to the everyday it may bore them. Boring newspapers would surely constrict sales. But, do newspapers or news programs really escape the everyday? Lefebvre argues that

[n]ews stories and the turbulent affectations of art, fashion and event veil without ever eradicating the everyday blahs. Images, the cinema and television divert the everyday by at times offering up to its own spectacle, or sometimes the spectacle of the distinctly noneveryday; violence, death, catastrophe, the lives of kings and stars – those who we are led to believe defy everydayness.¹⁴⁸

Interestingly enough, when the news is at its most banal in its everydayness it is seen as a slow news day. Despite its emphasis on the exceptional, Lefebvre believes "the 'news' never contains anything really new."¹⁴⁹ An ideal version of the daily news conceals the everyday in that it highlights the exceptional and entertaining, whereas it simultaneously reveals a daily practice for many television viewers who make up the audience. Such infotainment where nothing remotely close to the everyday is presented can be contrasted with the social networking tools Twitter and Facebook, or even texting which are all largely used for extending one's everydayness to any and all that are willing to look at it. For example, today, while one yawns at the boring content of the daily newscast on the television screen for its lack of excitement, one picks up an iPhone for distraction and is

¹⁴⁷ Georges Perec, "Approaches to What?" *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. Ben Highmore (London: Routledge, 2002), 177. In a footnote to their introductory essay to the collection of Lefebvre's work called *Writings on Cities*, Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas made note of their friendship: "Perec knew Lefebvre well, for he frequented the New Left of which Lefebvre was one of the older members, and whom Perec called a sad clown." In "Lost in Transposition," 15.

¹⁴⁸ EE, 10-11.

¹⁴⁹ CEL 2, 77.

enthralled by the plethora of virtual friends who have updated their statuses on Facebook describing what they had for dinner, what they are wearing to school tomorrow, or how they are feeling. All of these are tools utilized for the ever important aspect of everyday life to pass the time.

Leisure and Escapism

What time is being passed when one proclaims they are just passing the time? There are so many to choose from. Alone time, leisure time, work time, are a select few of the myriad categories of time scattered throughout everyday life. It will be instructive to first focus on two important forms of time for Lefebvre. The spaces of everyday life are pregnant with the tension between what he calls cyclic time and linear time. These two forms of time are “two very different modalities of the repetitive.”¹⁵⁰ He outlines them as follows:

The everyday is situated at the intersection of two modes of repetition: the cyclical, which dominates in nature, and the linear, which dominates in processes known as “rational.” The everyday implies on the one hand cycles, nights and days, seasons and harvests, activity and rest, hunger and satisfaction, desire and its fulfillment, life and death, and it implies on the other hand the repetitive gestures of work and consumption.¹⁵¹

Linear time – which can be compared to what Guy Debord refers to as “irreversible time,” or the “general time of society”¹⁵² – excels with the modern world. It is the time instituted by the market. While the cyclical and the linear are both persistent features of everyday life, for Lefebvre, natural, cyclical time struggles against the rationalized, linear time.

In modern life, the repetitive gestures tend to mask and to crush the cycles. The everyday imposes its monotony. It is the invariable constant of the variations it

¹⁵⁰ CEL 3, 11.

¹⁵¹ EE, 10.

¹⁵² Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 107.

envelops. The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet – here lies the contradiction at the heart of everydayness – everything changes. But the change is programmed: obsolescence is planned. Production anticipates reproduction; production produces change in such a way as to superimpose the impression of speed onto that of monotony. Some people cry out against the acceleration of time, others cry out against stagnation. They’re both right.¹⁵³

Lefebvre here demonstrates that linear time is programmed. In contrast, cyclic is not.

Everyday life is modelled on abstract, quantitative time, the time of watches and clocks. This time was introduced bit by bit in the West after the invention of watches, in the course of their entry into social practice. This homogeneous and desecralised time has emerged victorious since it supplied *the measure of time of work*.¹⁵⁴

Similar to Lefebvre, Anthony Giddens writes that “[t]he widespread use of mechanical timing devices facilitated, but also presumed, deeply structured changes in the tissue of everyday life – changes which could not only be local, but were inevitably universalising.”¹⁵⁵

The everyday imposes its monotony and the monotony imposes the everyday.

This being specific to modern life is evident when one considers that, according to Barry Schwartz, conceptions of time are also specific to modernity. He begins his book, *Queuing and Waiting*, with a rather startling claim:

Many traditional societies furnish no equivalent for the English word “time”; their members consequently have no conception of what it is to be “on time” or to “wait.” In a modern society, however, where order is the outcome of integrated scheduling and where productive and monetary value is assigned to systematically divided units of time, it becomes not only possible but, from a practical standpoint, also quite necessary for punctuality and delay to be reflected upon and to become serious concerns of everyday life.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ EE, 10.

¹⁵⁴ RH, 73.

¹⁵⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 17.

¹⁵⁶ Barry Schwartz, *Queuing and Waiting: Studies in the Social Organization of Access and Delay*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 1.

Indeed, time schedules are certainly serious concerns of everyday life. This is not the startling part. What is jarring in Schwartz's formulation is the fact that time as a concept has a historical uniqueness to it. For those unaware of this fact, it could be said that they have no conception of no conception of time. A shared conception of linear time, enforced by time schedules, is essential for the function of modern society. This is most forcefully endorsed and perpetuated by the 'double process' of urbanization and industrialization.

"Urbanization and industrialization," writes Elizabeth Goodstein, "had thoroughly transformed the temporality of everyday life, integrating people into modern orders of work and consumption that depended on the highly rationalized temporal framework of 'living by the clock.'"¹⁵⁷ This serves as another link with Lefebvre who writes: "If we examine time as it is experienced by many of today's men and women, we will see that it is chock-a-block full and completely empty."¹⁵⁸ This is a fine rebuttal for those who scoff at the idea of even having the time to be bored, such as those mentioned in the introductory chapter. There are many who "readily admit being bored much of the time, not just in work but in leisure and voluntary activities."¹⁵⁹

How is leisure related to everyday life? Lefebvre writes, "[t]oday leisure is first of all and for (nearly) all a temporary break with everyday life. We are undergoing a painful and premature revision of all our old 'values'; leisure is no longer a festival, the reward of labour, and it is not yet a freely chosen activity pursued for itself, it is a

¹⁵⁷ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 336.

¹⁵⁸ CEL 2, 75.

¹⁵⁹ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 11.

generalized display: television, cinema, tourism.”¹⁶⁰ A passage by Joe Moran can be seen as an extension of Lefebvre’s thought on this point: “While leisure provides the illusion of individualistic escape from the monotony of life and work under capitalism, boredom in fact threatens the leisure classes as much as it does the workers at their machines.”¹⁶¹ This is consistent with Elizabeth Goodstein’s concept of a democratization of skepticism, mentioned in the first chapter. The monotony of the everyday imposes itself on a great deal of people. More money cannot help one get away from boredom, and neither can less money. So why do people continue on with their everyday lives as they are?

Leaving the everyday is part of the everyday. That is, ‘escapism’ is part and parcel of the fabric of everyday life.¹⁶² While there are those who assume escapism, or ‘getting away from it all’, is far away from being a form of alienation, Lefebvre argues that “there is an alienation through escapism, and a different one through non-escapism.”¹⁶³ Distractions are constantly sought out, and, in turn, distractions constantly seek out. Distractions are important elements to escapism. They allow one the opportunity to get away from ‘it’. What is this ‘it’ that people refer to on a daily basis? With enough money and time it is presumably easy to get away from ‘it’. But if one has enough money and time, why get away from it? That is to say, if ‘it’ provides so much satisfaction, why would anyone want to escape? Henri Lefebvre offers a fine example of such attempts at escapism:

One fine morning the middle-class citizen passes out like a Victorian lady, or like the Kierkegaardian character he starts shouting ‘Everything is now possible’; he is

¹⁶⁰ ELMW, 54. Television and its relationship to boredom will be dealt with in the final section of the fourth chapter in this dissertation.

¹⁶¹ Joe Moran, “Benjamin and Boredom,” 169-170.

¹⁶² This section primarily focuses more on the escapism involving physical space (drug and alcohol use are exceptions). The other escapism - of stepping outside of the everyday while remaining within the same physical space - will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁶³ CEL 2, 209.

no longer content with exchanging reality for make-believe and vice versa, with jumbling the levels, he wants something else; consuming satisfies him and yet leaves him dissatisfied; consuming is not happiness, comfort and ease are not all, joy does not depend on them; he is bored.¹⁶⁴

How is this escapism? With everything being possible, this ‘character’ believes he can do whatever he pleases. But all the while he yearns for something else. If it cannot be consumed, what could it be? His situation leaves him feeling bored. His boredom appears to be a dead end street with nowhere to turn. The content he longs for is not readily available to him. Perhaps Jean Baudrillard is correct when he writes, “our leisure now is no more than the charnel-house where dead time is born.”¹⁶⁵

This brings Martin Heidegger’s lectures from 1929/30 back into the picture.

Having used the example of waiting at a train station for his first form of boredom, for his second form of boredom Heidegger uses the example of a dinner party. This would be an apt example for Henri Lefebvre who once mentioned “the exquisite boredom of the never-ending dinner party with over polite host.”¹⁶⁶ Given that there are three forms of boredom for Heidegger, this second form is best viewed as an intermediate form between the first and the third. In reference to Heidegger’s example, Parvis Emad puts it nicely as a situation where one “participate[s] without being involved.”¹⁶⁷ One is present at the party, but also absent. Orrin E. Klapp would characterize it as “busy boredom.”¹⁶⁸ This

¹⁶⁴ ELMW, 94. Consumption, in the Lefebvrian sense of the term, never satisfies, because it is not supposed to satisfy. That is, consuming does not permanently fill a void, it is meant to be temporary. A consumer would stop being a consumer if total satisfaction were ever achieved. Therefore, there is always room for more satisfaction. Lefebvre argues: “Consuming creates nothing, not even a relation between consumers, it only consumes; the act of consuming, although significant enough in this so-called society of consumption, is a solitary act, transmitted by a mirror effect, a play with mirrors on/by the other consumer.” ELMW, 115. The theme of consumption will be explored in much more depth in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

¹⁶⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories I*, 115.

¹⁶⁶ IM, 125.

¹⁶⁷ Parvis Emad, “Boredom as Limit and Disposition,” *Heidegger Studies* 1 (1985): 68.

¹⁶⁸ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 32.

busy boredom consists of having a plethora of activities to do, but these activities lack meaning that grips someone in a significant way. This would be a difficult boredom to combat since busy work does not remedy it, as one is experiencing this form of boredom while one is doing busy work, or, in this case, attending a party. It is not, however, the activities that are boring for one in Heidegger's view, as "what bores us in this boredom is that 'I know not what', that indeterminate unknown."¹⁶⁹ This boredom is "less situation-bound than the first" form of boredom and "we are held more toward ourselves, somehow enticed back into the specific gravity of Dasein."¹⁷⁰ I would argue, instead, that it is similarly situation bound such as Heidegger's first form of boredom mentioned in the first chapter. It is just a different situation. The continuity lies in the shared pursuit of the interesting of both the 'we at the train station in the first example and attending a dinner party in the second example. Endlessly chasing after what is interesting, oftentimes the newest thing fosters the experience of boredom in the modern world and in everyday life, even if one is temporarily stepping out of the everyday.

So, why are dinner parties so boring? It is not the parties themselves per se that are boring. That is, parties as social functions where a diverse array of people gather together in a shared space does not entail the experience of boredom immediately. One possibility is the people at these parties, some of which may be given the unflattering moniker of 'bore'. Here is a broad sketch of a bore:

Those who carry the despicable reputation of being a bore have not earned it at home or in the work setting proper, but almost exclusively in those places and occasions given to sociability. Where people expect more of conversation they are accordingly repulsed by those who abuse it, whether by killing a topic with inappropriate remarks or by talking more than their share of the time. Characteristically, bores talk more loudly than others, substituting both volume

¹⁶⁹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 116.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 128.

and verbosity for wit and substance. Their failure at getting the effect they desire only serves to increase their demands upon the patience of the group. Conversation is a lively game, but the bore hogs the ball, unable to score but unwilling to pass it to others.¹⁷¹

What ‘bores’ do is waste someone else’s time in a relatively limited space. Jean

Baudrillard contributes something similar to this definition of the bore:

I quite like wasting my time, but not having my time wasted. When I am faced with too much calculated slowness, entirely affected even if circumstances impose it, or with the boredom exuded by certain of our contemporaries like a timeless virus, my impatience is unleashed – the only thing gained in the end being a bad conscience.¹⁷²

Friedrich Schlegel once wrote that “[b]oth in their origins and effects, boredom and stuffy air resemble each other. They are usually generated whenever a large number of people gather together in a closed room.”¹⁷³ The bore would be at home in the confined space of a dinner party and, perhaps, the effect would intensify one’s boredom. The boredom of the dinner party can be found at other leisure events. For example, Adorno theorizes a constellation of leisure activities that are of the same ilk as dinner parties:

That this self-fêting in no way enriches life is manifest in the boredom of the cocktail parties, the weekend invitations to the country, the golf, symbolic of the whole sphere, the organization of the social round – privileges giving real enjoyment to none, and serving only to conceal from the privileged how much in the joyless whole they too are without the possibility of pleasure.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, 29. Lefebvre similarly attributes this type of person, who is a preacher of sorts, to be a bore. IM, 112. While this boisterous ‘bore’ in Oldenburg’s example can be found at social parties, another type of bore has been identified by Lefebvre as one born and fostered in a political party: the Communist man. Lefebvre writes: “The new man, the so-called Communist man, has only one failing: he is a bore. This twentieth-century stereotype oozes ennui like a damp wall.” IM, 85. To use Orrin E. Klapp’s terms of overload (abundance of stimulation) and underload (lack of stimulation), it can be said that whereas the social party ‘bore’ in Oldenburg’s example exudes an ‘overload’ of activity in conversations, the political party ‘bore’ in Lefebvre’s example exudes an underload of activity. One talks a lot, the other rarely speaks. Both the social party ‘bore’ and the political party ‘bore’ fail to have meaningful dialogues with interlocutors.

¹⁷² Baudrillard, *Fragments: Cool Memories III*, 121.

¹⁷³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 18.

¹⁷⁴ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 190.

These activities are all ways of temporarily escaping one's everyday life. As Adorno claims, these activities do not offer what they promise.

What, if anything, follows through with its promises for escaping everyday life? What about tourist brochures? Perhaps some of the time for some people they do deliver. However, according to Lefebvre, tourist maps and guide books emphasize 'beauty spots'. As Lefebvre would say, "[i]f the maps and guides are to be believed, a veritable feast of authenticity awaits the tourist."¹⁷⁵ What is this authenticity? Is it spending a week living as the locals do? Do all locals live in similar manners? Yes and no. Yes, in that one has limited options for shopping for groceries, taking public transit, walking certain streets, going to certain theatres, etc. And no, in that people have different schedules, different friends and companions, different dwelling spaces, different interests, etc. There is no one way for locals to be. So how does one capture the authenticity of such an experience? As Lefebvre puts it, "tourism [is] a modern phenomenon that has become essential, and which in a curious way prolongs the historical problematic of conquests. Here too a paradox reveals itself: tourism is added to the traditional and customary use of space and time, of monumentality and rhythms 'of the other' without making it disappear."¹⁷⁶ It would seem as though one must partake in a 'conquest' in order to capture the essence of a particular space. That is, of course, if the tourist brochures are to be believed.

It is not too difficult to see the antithetical relationship between the everyday and vacations.¹⁷⁷ When going on vacation, people often remark that they are "getting away"

¹⁷⁵ PS, 84.

¹⁷⁶ RH, 97-98.

¹⁷⁷ Although, Lefebvre wrote facetiously that: "Leisure activities and holidays must be the true life. The true life starts the moment we go away." IM, 90. In 1967, Lefebvre acknowledged the novelty of vacations

or “I just need to get away,” etc. What exactly are they getting away from? Their everyday lives, of course.

One only has to open one’s eyes to understand the daily life of the one who runs from his dwelling to the station, near or far away, to the packed underground train, the office or the factory, to return the same way in the evening and come home to recuperate enough to start again the next day. The picture of this generalized misery would not go without a picture of ‘satisfactions’ which hides it and becomes the means to elude it and break free from it.¹⁷⁸

There are ample opportunities available for exiting the everyday, albeit briefly,¹⁷⁹ if one has the financial means.

The leisure industry rounds off the culture industry by offering travel plans and tourism, which are bought like a wardrobe offering travel plans and tourism, which are bought like a wardrobe or an apartment you can move into immediately. *Discover* such and such a country, town, mountain, sea! People buy the ‘discovery’, the change of scene, the departure and escape, which prove disappointing because they no longer have anything in common with the wish (not desire) and the advertisement. In its turn, the tourist industry thus perfects that of organized leisure and culture, fragmented into exchangeable pieces like space. The extra-ordinary sells very well, but it is now no more than a sad mystification. In this way, the image of a pseudo-freedom takes shape, one that is practically organized and substituted for ‘genuine freedom’, which has remained abstract. Hence a continuity in the simulation of use, and in the simulation of not working by leisure.¹⁸⁰

Regarding parents taking their kids on a ‘family vacation’ to Las Vegas or Atlantic City, James Howard Kunstler argues that “a more dreadful sort of boredom is hard to imagine

(holidays), or taking time off work. “A new universal social phenomenon, the holiday, has displaced anxiety and is becoming its focal point,” writes Lefebvre. ELMW, 53.

¹⁷⁸ WC, 159.

¹⁷⁹ Lefebvre explains how we cannot completely exit the everyday as follows: “We cannot step beyond the everyday. The marvellous can only continue to exist in fiction and the illusions that people share. There is no escape. And yet we wish to have the illusion of escape as near to hand as possible. An illusion not entirely illusory, but constituting a ‘world’ both apparent and real (the reality of appearances and the apparently real) quite different from the everyday world yet as open-ended and as closely dovetailed into the everyday as possible. So we work to earn our leisure, and leisure has only one meaning: to get away from work. A vicious circle.” CEL 1, 40.

¹⁸⁰ CEL 3, 82.

for a child.”¹⁸¹ Since anyone under the age of 21 is not allowed inside the casinos, children are left to fend for themselves outside its confines. Only those that can legally consume alcohol are allowed to gamble their money away, or, as would be the equivalent for Joseph Brodsky, game their boredom away. Only the adults are allowed to escape from boredom in these situations.

There is, of course, the option of purchasing one’s own vacation spot instead of going to a resort. “Leisure spaces,” writes Lefebvre, “are the object of a massive speculation that is not tightly controlled and is often assisted by the state (which builds highways and communications, and which directly or indirectly guarantees the financial operations etc.). This space is sold, at high prices, to citizens who have been harried out of the town by boredom and the rat-race.”¹⁸² Here, it seems as though boredom drives people out of the everyday, or at least drives their desire to exit the everyday, in search of adventure. Jean Baudrillard does not agree with those that think they can escape boredom and the everyday so easily. He argues that

a human being can find a vacation a greater boredom than in everyday life – a redoubled boredom, because it is made up of all the elements of happiness and distraction. The important point is the predestination of vacations to boredom, the bitter and triumphal foreboding that there’s no escaping this. How could we suppose that people were going to disavow their daily life and look for an alternative to it? On the contrary, they’ll make a destiny out of it: intensify it while seeming to do the opposite, plunge into it to the point of ecstasy, seal the monotony of it with an even greater monotony. This hyperbanality is the equivalent of fatality.¹⁸³

Keeping with Baudrillard, he offers the following assessment of the shift in the experience of boredom. “Boredom,” writes Baudrillard, “used to be born out of

¹⁸¹ James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 225.

¹⁸² SC, 84.

¹⁸³ Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Philippe Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 222-223.

uniformity; today, it is the product of acceleration. The more we believe we are escaping boredom by centrifugal force, the more we fall into true boredom.”¹⁸⁴ Is this boredom of today some sort of postmodern boredom? Baudrillard’s assertion is remarkably similar to the concept of ‘overload’ that Klapp associated with boredom in what he often referred to as the ‘information society’. The acceleration that Baudrillard is referring to is also similar to Georg Simmel’s comments on blaséness.¹⁸⁵ However, is Baudrillard’s new type of boredom a new form of boredom as he claims? Boredom arising out of uniformity is deemed to be a thing of the past, though this should be taken as an exaggeration since it surely exists today. Such uniformity can even be found on vacation.

Though he never utilized the specific terminology, Klapp refers to numerous cultural and social phenomena that are consistent with the literature on ‘postmodernity’. Maybe the term ‘postmodernity’ simply is not needed for Klapp to articulate his thoughts. Klapp does, however, cover many of the same themes as the postmodernist par excellence Jean Baudrillard. For example, while referring to what he calls ‘banalization’, or “the overload of sameness,”¹⁸⁶ Klapp writes, “[t]he ultimate banality of travel is offered by Disney Enterprises’ World Showcase, in which one does not go anywhere at all but visits imitation places, such as a Costa Rican fishing village, Japanese feudal fortress, or Moroccan walled city.”¹⁸⁷ Similarly, Baudrillard argues that “what is offered in Disneyland is a parody of the world of imagination.”¹⁸⁸ It is a simulation of the real vacation where one is at the actual physical location. Of course, it is slightly more

¹⁸⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments: Cool Memories III*, 20.

¹⁸⁵ Simmel’s concept of blaséness will be examined in much more depth in the second section of the next chapter.

¹⁸⁶ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 128.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁸⁸ Baudrillard, *America*, 55.

complicated than that, as most people that go to Disney World/Disneyland are on vacation at an actual physical location.¹⁸⁹ One goes to these locations to go on vacation. You have to therefore go on vacation in order to simulate another vacation. In a sense, it is a vacation without a vacation. It could be that, according to Best and Kellner, “for many, Disney World and other theme parks with simulated environments are more attractive than actual geographical sites.”¹⁹⁰ For those that believe Disney World and/or Land allows for ample opportunity to escape from the boredom of everyday life, James Howard Kunstler certainly disagrees. He argues that “because everything is programmed or scripted down to the last detail, there is an inescapable air of mechanized boredom to these goings-on.”¹⁹¹ Whatever mystery surrounded this land of adventure in the anticipation leading up to experiencing it quickly vanishes when its visitors come to the realization that there is nothing unique about it.

The ‘inescapable air of mechanized boredom’ is not restricted to resorts, but can also be found in the surrounding cities/suburbs. In reference to a planning proposal for a plastic tree project in Los Angeles, Klapp writes: “The time may be coming when people prefer the fake to the real, even outdoors.”¹⁹² He notes that this proposal was met with substantial backlash from the public and was ultimately withdrawn from consideration. Though, if Klapp is correct, it may just be a matter of time when spaces become more and more artificial. After collecting some dust, such a proposal could resurface in the future. This is an interesting example of society’s straddle between the modern and the

¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, Baudrillard once wrote: “At Disneyworld in Florida they are building a giant mock-up of Hollywood, with the boulevards, studios, etc. One more spiral in the simulacrum. One day they will rebuild Disneyland at Disneyworld.” *Cool Memories II*, 42.

¹⁹⁰ Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure*, 74.

¹⁹¹ Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, 225.

¹⁹² Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 68.

postmodern. Though natural trees are surely not a product of modernity, the cityscape of concrete and glass throughout Los Angeles was mixed with natural trees in modernity. The simulation of trees is a step towards postmodernity. The mere fact that such a proposal was formulated and even considered shows that some are willing to take the necessary steps toward a postmodern society. If a fake plastic tree were damaged, it could easily be replaced by another identical fake plastic tree. This would give some sort of continuity to the cityscape where one could count on seeing the same plastic tree in the same condition no matter what time of the day or day of the year. Would such consistency and stasis lead to boredom? Would the simulation be enough to take the place of the real thing? Best and Kellner similarly wonder how “perhaps individuals eventually get bored with mere simulation and hyperreality, or perhaps they are confronted by the discrepancies between these realms and their lived experience.”¹⁹³ Sometimes when one’s physical environment lacks the necessary stimulation, the remedy sought is not in another physical space, but in another mental space.

Klapp notes that the consumption of drugs and/or alcohol is often associated with boredom, or, more precisely, as the instruments employed to propel one away from boredom.¹⁹⁴ In William S. Burroughs’s novel *Naked Lunch* the character Dr. Benway offers his professional medical opinion on the junky’s (stereotypical: after all, they’re all the same to him) relationship to boredom. “Boredom,” asserts Dr. Benway, “which always indicates an undischarged tension, never troubles the addict. He can look at his shoe for eight hours. He is only roused to action when the hourglass of junk runs out.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure*, 80.

¹⁹⁴ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 16.

¹⁹⁵ William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: the Restored Text*, eds. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 31.

Coincidentally, a hit of ‘junk’ lasts the same amount of time as the traditional 9 to 5 job: eight hours. In this case, the ‘junk’ washes away the boredom of everyday life. This has further implications, outside of the realm of fiction. Lars Svendsen has also commented on drugs as a form of escapism from boredom.

In a culture determined by pure functionality and efficiency, boredom will rule because the quality of the world disappears in the pantransparency, in the all-embracing diaphanousness. In such a culture, experiments with sex and drugs – or escapes into the fog of new religion, for that matter – will appear tempting, because they seem to offer a way out of a piteously boring everyday life and a way into something that goes beyond the banal. The sad thing is that these exercises can never satisfy the longing out of which they spring.¹⁹⁶

Drugs appear as a way to get away from ‘it’. To Svendsen, they are only temporary fixes to a much larger issue, which, according to Lefebvre is the absence of style in everyday life. While Lefebvre and Svendsen share a commonality on this issue, Lefebvre would be at odds with Svendsen’s declaration of an ‘all-embracing diaphanousness’.

What exactly does Svendsen mean by this or ‘pantransparency’? He seems to be referring to a view where the world is portrayed as clear, obvious, evident. With this, ideology has been liquidated from the world, much the same as alienation. Put simply, this is the ideology of the end of ideology.¹⁹⁷ This would account for the closing remarks in Svendsen’s book that there is no escape from boredom, which is essentially a variation of the ‘end of history’ thesis.¹⁹⁸ Lefebvre is much more optimistic in believing that the style of the past can be revitalized, albeit in a new form. It is, however, difficult to create

¹⁹⁶ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 89.

¹⁹⁷ Lefebvre once wrote that “[i]deology leads to an awareness of ideology. Once ideology has been rendered conscious, it is powerless. An awareness of ideology means the end of ideology.” IM, 91. Elsewhere, Lefebvre notes that recognizing ideology can be difficult given that “ideology can profess to be non-ideology.” SC, 29. In the third volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre also notes that this is “one of the most curious paradoxes in an age full of them: the ideology of the end of ideologies.” CEL 3, 33.

¹⁹⁸ Incidentally, Lefebvre wrote a book called *The End of History* (*La fin de l'histoire*) where he briefly philosophizes about the implications of a ‘post-historical boredom’ (*l'ennui post-historique*). See Henri Lefebvre, *La fin de l'histoire* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1970), 207-208.

awareness of this absence of style since style seems to be everywhere today. However, to Lefebvre, today's style is tomorrow's boredom and will continue to be so until there is widespread recognition that the various attempts to actively break out of everyday life via holiday, heroine, or hanging out are often futile ones. At best, it is a temporary solution to an enduring problem. At the end of whichever road is travelled, the boredom of everyday life seems to be waiting patiently. Perhaps this is a bit hasty. After all, people are free to pursue whichever lifestyle(s) they wish. But are these really styles of life? Despite the overabundance of styles available, it is at least plausible that Lefebvre was on to something when he claimed an absence of style. If so, all attempts to escape the boredom of everyday life in modernity are doomed to fail from the start.

The escape from everyday life is an escape from the rationalized routine that is a common link between people of various social and cultural backgrounds in an industrialized and urbanized society. For Lefebvre, this 'double process' continuously permeates all aspects of everyday life and results in an absence of style in everyday life. This, for Lefebvre, is a hallmark of modernity, though one that is largely hidden from view and one where an irrational reality is masked by rationality. Lefebvre explains the root of this as follows: "Hidden beneath what appears to be human reason lies an irrational reality; but lying even more deeply hidden beneath what appears to be absurd is a dehumanized Rationality. Where? All around us – though not so much in rural areas as in our 'modern' towns."¹⁹⁹ To further investigate the absence of style in everyday life, the logic of such 'modern towns' will be examined in the following chapter. This is

¹⁹⁹ CEL 1, 244.

important for Lefebvre's project of a critique of everyday life, as the street is for him "the microcosm of modern life."²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ CEL 2, 310. Perhaps in reference to this passage, Lefebvre scholar, Kristin Ross, has noted that "the active urban street [...], for Lefebvre, represents everyday life in its most complete figuration, the microcosm or condensation of modern life." Kristin Ross, "Streetwise: The French Invention of Everyday Life," *Parallax* 2(1), (February, 1996), 72.

Chapter 3: The Incredible Dullness of Urbanism

A more subtle cause of the prevalence of boredom was the disproportionate growth of the great towns.¹ – Aldous Huxley

It is thickest in cities where there are the most varieties, pleasures, and opportunities. Like smog, it spreads to all sorts of places it is not supposed to be. The most common name for this cloud is boredom.² – Orrin E. Klapp

As a form of subjective malaise proper to modernity, boredom is first of all an urban phenomenon.³ – Elizabeth Goodstein

* * * * *

In Martin Heidegger's lectures from 1929/1930, he theorizes a form of boredom called "profound boredom," which is described as a "*fundamental attunement*."⁴ After stating that there is no example for this type of boredom, an "entirely non-binding" example is given of going for a walk through the streets of a big city on a Sunday afternoon.⁵ It is worth noting that while this is a supposedly "non-binding" example, Heidegger was not alone in using Sunday in a big city as an example of boredom. For instance, Walter Benjamin, in his essay 'Some Motifs on Baudelaire' writes: "The man who loses his capacity for experiencing feels as though he is dropped from the calendar. The big-city dweller knows this feeling on Sunday."⁶ In his essay on Benjamin and boredom, Joe Moran notes that what Benjamin was referring to was none other than the experience of boredom.

For Benjamin, one of the most significant developments of modernity is the replacement of *Erfahrung* with *Erlebnis*: in other words, the capacity to assimilate, recollect and communicate experience to others is replaced by the

¹ Aldous Huxley, "Accidie," 354.

² Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 11-12.

³ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 18.

⁴ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 80. He interprets this third form of boredom as "the condition of possibility of the first and thereby the second,"⁴ which were mentioned in the previous two chapters. *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 184-185.

sense of life as a series of disconnected impressions with no common associations. The man who is denied the potential for *Erfahrung* is a hostage to boredom.⁷

In another essay, titled ‘The Storyteller’, Benjamin delves further into the relationship between the city and boredom.

If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places – the activities that are intimately associated with boredom – are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well.⁸

With this example, it would seem as though boredom could not be experienced in a profound way in a city, at least not the way Heidegger envisions. This is odd considering Benjamin explicitly links boredom with the city in his *Arcades Project*. Unfortunately, as Joe Moran notes, Benjamin failed to provide a specific definition of boredom, instead only offering fragments.⁹ Nevertheless, it is curious how two intellectuals as diverse as Heidegger and Benjamin both use the big city on a Sunday as an example of boredom.¹⁰ There are two aspects to this example that may be isolated for the purpose of the present discussion.

The first aspect of the above example from Heidegger’s lectures is Sunday, specifically Sunday afternoon, though the day itself will serve as the general example. To some, Sunday is the key element for the awakening of boredom. For example, in his piece “Dare to be Lazy” Roland Barthes quotes Schopenhauer’s statement: “The social representation of boredom is Sunday.” Barthes then argues that children are often bored

⁷ Joe Moran, “Benjamin and Boredom,” *Critical Quarterly*, 45 (1-2), (July, 2003): 169.

⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 91.

⁹ Moran, “Benjamin and Boredom,” 168.

¹⁰ The common link is especially curious considering Benjamin had planned on studying Heidegger’s *Being and Time* with his friend Bertolt Brecht in an effort to “annihilate Heidegger.” *Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, ed. Michael Jemmings et al. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), 841.

on Sundays, speaking not only about what he saw at the time of writing but also as a memory from his experience as a child. Now that he is an adult, Sunday is a “happy day” filled with idleness instead of boredom.¹¹ Depending on one’s perspective, or perhaps one’s position in life, Sunday may be associated with boredom or it may be associated with idleness, or perhaps something else entirely.

The second aspect to the example is the city. While this is ‘non-binding’ for Heidegger, I argue that using a big city as the example is more appropriate for discussing boredom, especially profound boredom, than Heidegger acknowledges in his lectures. What makes this form unique is what is absent in its experience. Heidegger argues that “[p]assing the time *is missing* in this boredom.”¹² How can it be that passing the time is missing? Is boredom not a heightened awareness of time? If time is missing, is space all that is left? Is this a spatial boredom? According to Heidegger, time is absent because one is not bored “with objects nor subjects, but temporality as such.”¹³ Quite simply, this form of boredom is characterized as: “It is boring for one. It – for one – not for me as me, not for you as you, not for us as us, but for one. Name, standings, vocation, role, age, and fate as mine and yours disappear.”¹⁴ What if ‘it’ is modernity itself? What if ‘it’ is the fabric of everyday life manifesting itself? How can we conceptualize this ‘it’? Heidegger goes on to write, “This profound boredom only becomes *awake* if we do not counteract it.”¹⁵ With this, this form of boredom is a lot more difficult to achieve than simply not counteracting it. Unexpected distractions arise all the time that are outside of

¹¹ Roland Barthes, “Dare to Be Lazy,” *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 345.

¹² Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 135.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

one's control. For example, there could be a beep of a car horn, a shout from the street, a bird chirping in a tree, etc. As Benjamin would say, a rustling in the leaves drives boredom away. Many of these occurrences are beyond one's control. They simply show up unexpectedly, especially with an area with a high concentration of people such as in a big city. Perhaps one would have to isolate oneself in order to experience profound boredom, but can this be done in a big city? Ben Highmore argues that "the city reveals itself as a series of possibilities as well as the closure of possibilities through the production of boredom and constraint."¹⁶ It would, therefore, be difficult to isolate oneself in a large city any time and it is unclear if Heidegger envisions encountering other people in this example. Although, it should be mentioned again, this example is not concrete for Heidegger. Rather, it is a 'non-binding' observation that is not given much weight. But is this really a random example?

Of the two aspects from Heidegger's example of walking in a city on a Sunday afternoon, this chapter will focus on the spatial element, but in the context of the everyday and not limiting it to one day. For this, the argument put forth in the previous chapter, the absence of style in everyday life, will be expanded. This is one of the central aspects of Lefebvre's fragmented theory of boredom and can readily be applied to modern urbanism. The key passage denoting this can be found in a book on Le Corbusier where Lefebvre offered two modest pages as a preface. Here, Lefebvre makes note of the "town-planning level, at which a certain way of life, a certain style (or absence of style) makes itself felt."¹⁷ The purpose of this chapter, then, is to develop Lefebvre's idea that

¹⁶ Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 133.

¹⁷ Henri Lefebvre, "Preface," *Lived-in Architecture: Le Corbusier's Pessac Revisited*, trans. Gerald Onn (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), np. Elsewhere, Lefebvre further articulates the relationship between everyday life, style/absence of style and the urban through a brief discussion of 'habitation'. He

the absence of style in everyday life, discussed in the previous chapter, is felt on the town-planning level. For this, I will tease out the links between the urbanism of modernity, its impact on everyday life, and the experience of boredom.¹⁸ Or, following C. Wright Mills, this chapter will “consider the metropolis-the horrible, beautiful, ugly, magnificent sprawl of the great city.”¹⁹ Therefore, this chapter will begin with a consideration of the metropolis and move on, or sprawl out, from there. For this, several key critiques of city planning will be considered. One of the goals is to sketch the importance of the straight line in modernist planning and architecture. For this, ironically, a straight line will not be taken with sources, which would surely fill volumes, but instead a selection of some of the most prominent ‘doctors of space’²⁰ who have had

writes: “Habitation expresses itself ‘objectively’ in an ensemble of the creations, products and things that make up a partial system: the house, the city or the urban area. Each object is part of the whole, and carries its stamp; it testifies to the style (or lack of style) of the whole.” KW, 126. For Lefebvre, the partial objects that constitute the whole, or totality, are keys for understanding the lack of style, or boredom, felt in a given area.

¹⁸ In their effort towards an ‘Urban Design Manifesto’, Allan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard argue that “architects and planners take cities and themselves too seriously; the result too often is deadliness and boredom, no imagination, no humor, alienating places. But people need an escape from the seriousness and meaning of the everyday.” Allan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard, “Toward an Urban Design Manifesto,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 53(1), (Winter, 1987): 116. There are several insights in these two lines. The first is that Jacobs and Appleyard speak of both architects and planners in the same breath. Oftentimes the one is emphasized at the exclusion of the other. The authors see the need to integrate the two perspectives. After all, what are buildings with no city and what is a city without buildings? The second insight, which is most explicitly relevant for the present discussion, is the boredom that goes along with the production of urban space. Here a link is made between boredom and alienation. The third point to be extracted is the need for an escape from the everyday. In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that people do indeed seek escape from the everyday via holidays, dinner parties, or even drugs. Jacobs and Appleyard are suggesting that an escape from the everyday ought to be found in cities. A different kind of everyday life does not seem to be a possibility for them. This is due to the repulsion Jacobs and Appleyard, among so many others, share for everyday life. To them, everyday life is so obviously monotonous and undesirable that it should be limited as much as possible. This, of course, is not possible for numerous ordinary individuals.

¹⁹ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

²⁰ My use of the term ‘doctors of space’ stems from the following passage by Lefebvre: “In connection with the city and its extensions (outskirts, suburbs), one occasionally hears talk of a ‘pathology of space’, of ‘ailing neighbourhoods’, and so on. This kind of phraseology makes it easy for people who use it – architects, urbanists or planners – to suggest the idea that they are, in effect, ‘doctors of space’. This is to promote the spread of some particularly mystifying notions, and especially the idea that the modern city is a product not of capitalist or neocapitalist system but rather of some putative ‘sickness’ of society.” PS, 99. A similar passage, referring to the desire of urbanists to heal “a sick society” can be found in Lefebvre’s book *The Urban Revolution*. UR, 157.

tremendous influence on modernity will be examined in concert with some of their more vocal critics.

There are four parts to this chapter. The first part discusses Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann's revolutionary city plan of Paris that was implemented in the nineteenth century and its implications for modernity, everyday life, and boredom. The second part shifts focus to pedestrians via a discussion of the blasé personality sketched by Georg Simmel in his essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'. So, while part one deals with urban form, the second part will deal with urban practice. The third part deals with the urban from the perspective of architects and their critics, most notably the foremost figure of high modernism, Le Corbusier. These three preceding chapters will all lead into the final section, which delves into the purely planned spaces of new towns via Lefebvre's critique of the new town of Mourenx, a town that arose in the Southwest of France in the middle of the twentieth century. It is here where everyday life can be viewed in what Lefebvre calls its most 'chemically pure' state.

The City: Haussmannization and its Discontents

To begin, it is important to ask: How could one discuss the boredom induced by urban spaces with any kind of specificity? It would seem as though one would require a general theory and it would be difficult for such a generalization to be convincing considering the impossibility of discussing all the intricacies of all urban areas.

However, it is somewhat interesting to note that emphasizing the fun or entertaining aspects of an entire city seems to occur fairly often. At the end of the last chapter, tourist brochures were mentioned as containing what Lefebvre refers to as 'beauty spots'. This is consistent with the brief description of present-day Paris that can be found in the *New*

York Times bestseller *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*. The description is as follows: “In the City of Light, the birthplace of romance and style, everything is magic, and anything can happen.”²¹ Based on this description, it would seem as though it were nearly impossible to be bored in such a magical place. After all, ‘anything can happen’ there. As well, according to the description, style was born there, so the absence of style Lefebvre wrote about over and over again, it would seem, must have been directed at other spaces, if it has any credibility at all. If anything, there is an abundance of style to be found there, if one were to follow this description. Of course, Lefebvre argues that, on the contrary, Paris *used* to be a city of style before it was modernized. He notes that for all of the accolades bestowed upon modern day Paris for its beauty, it was actually the Paris of one hundred or two hundred years ago where “beauty reigned.”²² Despite his admiration for certain elements of the past, he is not romanticizing times gone by, as he is quick to point out that along with the reign of beauty was the reign of tuberculosis.²³ Regardless, if anything can be said about the Paris of modernity, it is that it is an *interesting* city and has been so since it entered modernity. After all, Walter Benjamin has labeled Paris the “capital of the nineteenth century.”²⁴ Further, David Harvey has even gone so far as to call it, in a subtitle to his book on Paris, the ‘capital of modernity’.²⁵ So, with Roland Barthes’ assertion that the nineteenth century is the century of boredom and Elizabeth Goodstein’s assertion that boredom and modernity are

²¹ Patricia Schultz, *1,000 Places to See Before You Die: A Traveler’s Life List* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2003), 115.

²² KW, 158.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See his essay “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” In Benjamin, *Reflections*, 146-162.

²⁵ David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2006).

intertwined, then Paris being the capital of both the nineteenth century and modernity seems to be a logical place to look for boredom and its relationship to the city.

How did Paris enter modernity? Or, perhaps the vital question to be asked is: How did modernity enter Paris? Regardless, one key element to the emergence of modern Paris is the design of the city itself. The city planner Baron Haussmann was given absolute power to impart his design on Paris.²⁶ Or, as David Harvey puts it in a much more partisan way, Haussmann “bludgeoned the city into modernity.”²⁷ The transition from Ancient to Modern Paris, then, was not a seamless process.

The urbanism of Haussmann tore out the heart of old medieval Paris and reinvented the concept of a center, of a downtown of bright lights and conspicuous consumption. Erstwhile pesky proletarians would take hold of shovels, man the buildings sites, and have no time to make trouble. They’d also find themselves dispatched to a rapidly expanding *banlieue*, to the new suburbs mushrooming in the distance. In one sense, Paris gained as an independent work of art, as an aesthetic experience admired to this day by every tourist and visitor. Yet in another sense it lost something as a living democratic organism, as a source of generalized liberty. Hence Haussmann not only patented what we’d now call the gentrified city, with its commodification of space, but also pioneered a new class practice, bankrolled by the state: the deportation of the working class to the periphery, a divide-and-rule policy through urbanization itself, gutting the city according to a rational economic and political plan. The logic of the city would never quite be the same again.²⁸

It was nevertheless a process, and it is one that has been referred to by countless people as Haussmannization.

So what exactly is Hausmannization? This depends on one’s perspective. As with most things, there are both supporters and detractors of Haussmannization. According to Haussmann’s supporters, it entails the transformation of Paris into the City

²⁶ Haussmann’s plan had secular implications for Parisians. As Goodstein remarks, “[t]he city demolished by Baron Haussmann becomes an enigmatic figure for the emptiness of the heavens.” *Experience Without Qualities*, 234.

²⁷ Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, 3.

²⁸ Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre*, 93-94.

of Light.²⁹ Without him, the travel guide mentioned above would have a very different description. According to his detractors, Haussmannization was an “excessive use of compulsory purchase powers, blind demolition, and large-scale deportation of the poor.”³⁰ Taken together, these two views reveal that the beauty of Paris came with many sacrifices. Michael Carmona, one of his biographers, puts it as follows:

A strong man was certainly needed to turn a still medieval Paris into a great modern city. It is hardly surprising that Haussmann gave the impression of a vandal: he bought out tens of thousands of Parisians and dislodged hundreds of thousands more. Authoritarian, pragmatic, and efficient, he was concerned that there should be order in all things. Few people have done so much to shape the environment and the atmosphere of a city!³¹

The sacrifices did not stop when Haussmann did. That is to say, Haussmannization did not end with Haussmann’s life or his tenure under Napoleon III.³² Once the plan was set in motion, those that followed in Haussmann’s footsteps merely went along with it with little to no deviation. Was it because it was universally hailed at the time as a resound success? Put simply, the answer is no. Carmona summarizes the critical sentiment directed towards the Baron’s plan:

As the pieces fell into place, was the new Paris at least the bearer of a new beauty? On this, intellectuals were of a single mind: the Baron’s straight lines were deadly *boring*; no building exhibited any quality whatsoever. But the response to this dual verdict was not complicated, the straight line is at the heart of the French intellectual and aesthetic heritage; “straightness” is a quality, a “swaying” character a personality defect. Only toward the end of the twentieth century would civil engineers begin to ask whether highways should not have an occasional little bend, if only to avoid the sleepiness induced by *boredom*.³³

²⁹ Carmona, *Haussmann*, 404.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 385.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 439.

³² *Ibid.*, 438. Carmona goes on to say that another book would be required in order to fully sketch the contours of Haussmann’s influence.

³³ *Ibid.*, 433. (my italics)

The sentiment was, therefore, unanimous, at least among intellectuals.³⁴ Writing in a similar vein to Carmona, David Harvey argues that “the problem was the monotony, the homogeneity, and the boredom imposed by Haussmann’s geometrical attachment to the straight line.”³⁵ It would seem as though in the case of Paris, straight streets equate to boring ones.³⁶ To Leo Charney, the opening up the streets that came with Haussmannization inaugurated boredom on modernity. He writes: “Baron Haussmann thought he was just widening the streets, firming up the boulevards, getting the city clear and organized. By giving people all this space to walk in and all these sight lines to peer down, he wrought all the boredom of modernity.”³⁷

What inspired the Baron’s straight swaths cutting into the urban fabric of Paris? This question brings Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s railway study, mentioned in the first chapter, back into the picture. According to Schivelbusch, “Haussmann approached Paris as a railroad engineer approaches any terrain through which a line has to be laid.”³⁸ Haussmann, then, approached the city’s streets as if he were laying railway tracks. Much the same as the function of railway tracks, the primary function of Haussmann’s streets was to facilitate the flow of traffic.

The streets that Haussmann created served only traffic, a fact that distinguished them from the medieval streets and lanes that they destroyed, whose function was not so much to serve traffic as to be a forum for neighborhood life; it also distinguished them from the boulevards and the avenues of the Baroque, whose linearity and width was designed more for pomp and ceremony than for mere

³⁴ But are intellectuals standing outside and/or above everyday life? No. As Lefebvre puts it: “What of the intellectual? He is in it all right! Intellectuals have careers, wives, children, time-tables, private lives, working lives, leisure, dwellings in one place or another, etc.; they are in it, but in a slightly marginal position so that they think of themselves as being outside and elsewhere.” ELMW, 74.

³⁵ Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, 263.

³⁶ Although many critics agree on this point, it will be picked up again in chapter 4 in order to show some of the dissenting voices.

³⁷ Leo Charney, *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 114.

³⁸ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 182.

traffic. It is not even necessary to go back as far as the Baroque to recognize the ‘modernity’ of the traffic function of Haussmann’s streets.³⁹

If nothing else, Haussmann was innovative. That is, innovative in his appropriation of other facets of modernity in order to propel Paris further into modernity. But are the railroads adequate models for streets? Schivelbusch argues that

[w]ith the remodeling of Paris to allow for flowing traffic, with the construction of streets ‘which have no significance in themselves but are essentially means of connection’, the inhabitants familiar with the old Paris experienced a situation similar to that of the first railroad travelers. As the latter, accustomed to the space-time perceptions of coach travel, experienced the railroad journey as a destruction of space and time, the former saw the new traffic-oriented city of Paris as destroyed – in a double sense: demolished physically as well as in its spatial and historical continuity. The railroad put an end to the lyricism of old modes of travel; the new thoroughfares signaled the end of the poeticism of Paris. (Contemporaries did not recognize the fact that, in both cases, the old appeared ‘poetical’ only at the very moment when the new technology announced its termination.)⁴⁰

It appears as though some individuals did not know what they had until it was gone.

Much like Lefebvre, Schivelbusch is here arguing that the Paris of old, the medieval Paris, is the beautiful urban space instead of its contemporary manifestation. What the travel guide does not express is the idea that there was once a different Paris that was lost with Haussmann’s plan. The guide gives the impression that the present day Paris, the modern Paris, is the one where style was born and not where style is profoundly absent.

The prospect of experiencing boredom in Paris is entirely absent from this particular travel guide. It emphasizes the ‘beauty spots’ of Paris, as opposed to what Lefebvre calls ‘the other Parises’. Lefebvre is unique among academics, as he once “of [his] own free will” took up the profession of taxi driver, or as Lefebvre calls it “existentialist philosopher-taxi driver” in order to analyze the “life of the people of

³⁹ Ibid., 183-184.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 184.

Paris.’⁴¹ To know Paris is to know its streets, it would seem. Lefebvre’s idea of ‘other Parises’ forms the basis for linking boredom and the City of Light. Lefebvre writes:

All over the world, people have become accustomed to seeing the tower above Paris, and Paris at the foot of the tower. The association has become unarguable: Paris has become an ‘environment’ of the Eiffel Tower; hence its popularity, expressed in all sorts of photographs, postcards, and more or less outrageously ‘kitschy’ objects. But the Tower has not entirely lost the properties of a technological object. As an icon, it seems rational. Around it lies a city based on reason, with Cartesian lines and horizons, occupying a homogenous space, without awkward roughness.⁴²

So while people associate the Eiffel Tower with Paris, the quotidian aspects go unnoticed. It is as if people are literally overlooking the ordinary in order to see the Eiffel Tower. Further to this, Lefebvre asks: “Where does the trite, ‘ordinary’ Paris persist, outside our mental images? In the prosperous neighbourhoods, no question of it, with their modern, straight streets and perfectly aligned façades that create noble, monotonous vistas; in the Paris of Napoleon and Haussmann, to be specific.”⁴³ Lefebvre goes on to explain the effects Haussmannization had on Paris over a century after it was first implemented. Writing in the mid 1970s, Lefebvre offered this summary:

Today, in a Paris that has spread out in an endless suburbia, there are dizzying swarms of people from all over the world: students, tourists, people passing through, travelers staying for a while, businessmen, etc. Is it a Tower of Babel or the great Babylon? In the legendary, monstrous city, everyone has some route of his own (from flat to school, the office, the factory) and does not know the rest very well. These familiar journeys are part of the everyday, practical and reassuring, narrower in many respects than the old neighbourhood life. And the representation (image) of the city? You would have to be a bit naïve to think the prevailing image resembles the one formed in a stroller’s mind. To wander through a modern city pursuing the ‘reveries of a solitary stroller’ is pleasant, no more, and soon becomes disappointing, unless it is accompanied by other interests and forms of curiosity. Representation of the city, for the majority of people, is restricted to banalities about the big department stores, about places that are ‘in’

⁴¹ KW, 7. Although he is not explicit in saying so, 1928 seems to be the year of this voyage.

⁴² Ibid., 152.

⁴³ Ibid., 155.

or 'out', to be visited or avoided. Urban reality, in its complication and complexity, becomes schematized.⁴⁴

The Eiffel Tower is both a part of the everyday of Parisians as a background to the cityscape, but it also transcends the everyday in the sense that it is a monument standing above the level of the everyday. It is, however, taken to be the everyday of Paris when travel guides emphasis it as an essential feature of Paris. It is a monument that shines brighter than most other buildings and most other ordinary elements that are equally part of Paris. Lefebvre explains that "[b]uildings are to monuments as everyday life is to festival, products to works, lived experience to the merely perceived, concrete to stone, and so on."⁴⁵ To experience Paris as the Parisians do, then, one must look past the monuments suggested in travel guides.

Aside from boredom, another item missing from the tourist guidebook is the student and worker uprising that occurred in May of 1968 in Paris.⁴⁶ Clearly, such a disturbance does not mesh very well with the emphasis on 'beauty spots' of travel guides. The emphasis on 'beauty spots' is at the exclusion of other items which are much more prevalent aspects of everyday life and are vital to its history as a city. This is where the sensational nature of newspapers is important for a window into the exceptional events that absent from guide books. For example, the sociologist Melvin Seeman begins his article 'The Signals of '68: Alienation in Pre-Crisis France' with a headline from the French newspaper *Le Monde* which Seeman believes was a major cause for the worker

⁴⁴ Ibid., 151-152.

⁴⁵ PS, 223.

⁴⁶ Lefebvre explores this event at length in his book *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval*, though he does not focus on boredom, with the exception of a few casual remarks.

and student uprising of May 1968 in Paris. The headline reads: “La France s’ennuie”⁴⁷ (France is bored). If the headline is taken seriously, what lead to this widespread boredom? Can an entire country be bored? If so, can boredom lead to rebellion? Seeman argues that “[t]he general boredom expressed so crisply in the pages of *Le Monde* in the Winter of ’67 erupted in a general rebellion in May of ’68.”⁴⁸ Seeman then wonders if anyone could have predicted that this ‘general boredom’ would have led to the uprising in Paris. This is, of course, a purely rhetorical exercise, as Seeman thinks “probably not.”⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, and the Situationist International would certainly be irritated at such a lack of recognition of their work. Although Seeman makes no mention of boredom for the rest of the article, preferring instead to discuss worker dissatisfaction (without linking it back to boredom), his initial insight remains a penetrating one.

Seeman’s article may have appeared completely different if he were aware of Benjamin, Lefebvre, and the Situationists who Andy Merrifield asks: “How many urbanists can write as tenderly about Paris as Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, or Guy Debord?”⁵⁰ Debord, the leader of the Situationist International, was unambiguously dismissive of Haussmann’s plan. He and his fellow Situationists would have loved nothing more than to transform the City of Light into the City of Life. Merrifield argues that much like Lefebvre, the Situationists had a goal

to renew the action of art on life (and life on art). They were bored with art, bored with politicians, bored with the city, bored in the city. The city had become banal; art had become banal; politics had become banal – it still is. Everything

⁴⁷ Melvin Seeman, “The Signals of ’68: Alienation in Pre-Crisis France,” *American Sociological Review* 37(4), (August, 1972): 385.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Merrifield, *Metromarxism*, 178.

needed changing; life needed changing, time and space needed changing, cities needed changing. Everybody was hypnotized by production and conveniences, by sewage systems, elevators, bathrooms, and washing machines.⁵¹

As for May '68, it could be said that the boredom of the Situationists was also the boredom portrayed in the pages of *Le Monde*. Like Lefebvre, the Situationists felt as though life in Paris was being strangled and needed reprieve from Haussmann's totalizing city planning. Debord summarizes his group's sentiment as follows:

Historical conditions determine what is considered "useful." Baron Haussmann's urban renewal of Paris under the Second Empire, for example, was motivated by the desire to open up broad thoroughfares enabling the rapid circulation of troops and the use of artillery against insurrections. But from any standpoint other than that of facilitating police control, Haussmann's Paris is a city built by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.⁵²

Small wonder that an English edition of the *Situationist International Anthology* begins with a piece by Ivan Chtcheglov with the opening words: "We are bored in the city, there is no longer any Temple of the Sun."⁵³

The Situationists famously wrote that "*Boredom is counterrevolutionary*. In every way."⁵⁴ This passage, it should be mentioned, was one of the graffiti slogans on the walls of Paris during the uprising.⁵⁵ Does this mean that boredom prevents revolution? I would argue no. This can be qualified by a few passages from the Situationist International member Raoul Vaneigem's 1967 book *The Revolution of Everyday Life* where he writes: "Anyone who has felt the drive to self-destruction welling

⁵¹ Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre*, 31.

⁵² Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 9.

⁵³ Ivan Chtcheglov, "Formulary for a New Urbanism," *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 1. Although this piece was actually written before the Situationists officially formed, the sentiment was sustained throughout their urban criticisms.

⁵⁴ Situationist International, "The Bad Days Will End," In *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 112.

⁵⁵ Situationist International, "Graffiti," In *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 445.

up inside him knows with what weary negligence he might one day happen to kill the organizers of his boredom.”⁵⁶ This is a key passage for linking boredom to the uprisings and Haussmann. Haussmann is one of the ‘organizers of boredom’ that Vaneigem is referring to. While Haussmann’s design cannot account for every boredom in France, but it is a concrete example of the ‘double process’ of urbanization and industrialization at the heart of everyday life. Vaneigem, a former associate of Lefebvre’s would certainly agree with Lefebvre’s statement that “urban life has yet to begin.”⁵⁷ Vaneigem also writes how “boredom breeds the irresistible rejection of uniformity, a refusal that can break out at any moment.”⁵⁸ With this, it would appear as though boredom may be counterrevolutionary only if one perpetuates it by perpetuating the ‘double process’, but it is revolutionary if one tarries with it long enough to see it as a general reflection of society. Such a view permeates the writings of the Situationist International, but is most succinctly summarized with the revolutionary cry at the end of Vaneigem’s book: “We have a world of pleasure to win, and nothing to lose but boredom.”⁵⁹ The Situationists, then, believed that only with an urban revolution could it be possible to eliminate boredom, or at the very least severely diminish it.

Is the association of boredom with Paris unique to radical intellectuals? It may be more prevalent amongst them, but Marxists (to use but one type of radical intellectual as an example) are not the only ones who believed Paris had complex ties with the experience of boredom. The sentiment goes back almost a century before the

⁵⁶ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Left Bank Books, 2006), 42.

⁵⁷ WC, 150.

⁵⁸ Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, 91.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 279. This is a détournement of the end of *The Communist Manifesto*. Vaneigem alters the well known phrase by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.” *The Communist Manifesto*, 58.

Situationists's time. In a letter written on December 25th of 1861, Charles Baudelaire explicitly attributes a vacation to Paris as the cause of his mother's (Caroline Aupick) boredom. Baudelaire states, "[t]hat wretched little trip to Paris affected you so much that now you're bored, you who never used to be bored at all."⁶⁰ Unfortunately, Baudelaire does not go into any detail for his theory of Paris being the likely cause of his mother's newfound affliction. Was it the sheer amount of entertainment and excitement found in Paris that subsequently made everything after it utterly banal and boring? Perhaps, that could be the case. Was it the design of Paris that was boring? That, too, could be what Baudelaire was getting at. After all, it was the 'wretched little trip' that is being blamed for the prolonged experience of boredom that was previously absent. If so, it would seem that boredom was spreading like a disease. It would appear as though Benjamin was on to something when, as mentioned in the first chapter, he believed the spread of boredom to be an epidemic in the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the sections (convolutes) C, D, and E of his *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin discusses Ancient Paris, boredom, and Haussmannization, respectively. If one were to go by the travel guide alone, boredom would surely seem out of place here. After all, how can the City of Light and love be so boring? The response to Haussmann's city planning is a clue. Such a clue can be found in Benjamin's decision to organize his project in this particular way. It is significant that the bridge from the old, Ancient Paris to the Paris of Haussmann is boredom. That is to say, although the physical space of Ancient Paris is usually thought of as being transformed by Haussmann's city planning, what goes unrecognized is the emergence of boredom around the same period of time.

⁶⁰ Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire: The Conquest of Solitude*, trans. and ed. Rosemary Lloyd (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 177.

Hausmann is one of the most influential city planners in the history of planning in general, but the modern world in particular. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to sketch the extent of someone's influence, Sigfried Giedeon in his "modernist summa"⁶¹ *Space, Time and Architecture* attempts to do so for Hausmann, albeit in a very general way. Giedeon clearly states that

Hausmann's direct influence was immense. In every country where industrialization was late in developing, one encounters details imitated from the transformation of Paris, particularly from the early accomplishments of the first *réseau*. There are few cities without a main street directed toward the axis of the central station, like the Boulevard Sébastopol and the Garde de l'Est. The Parisian boulevards find many an echo in monumental streets built up along the line of razed fortifications. But it was only details which were imitated. There was no one with Hausmann's power to attempt a general attack upon the new problem of the city.⁶²

So, while no one anywhere in the world was able to enact the sweeping changes Hausmann was afforded to impart on Paris, they were given the opportunity to model their cities after the Baron's design. They may be similar, but not exactly the same. As Lefebvre notes in his book *The Production of Space*, "[t]here is no need to subject modern towns, their outskirts and new buildings, to careful scrutiny in order to reach the conclusion that everything here resembles everything else."⁶³ As well, in an earlier book, *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre argues: "In spite of any efforts at homogenization through technology, in spite of the constitution of arbitrary isotopies, that is, separation and segregation, no urban place is identical to another."⁶⁴ A key distinction must be made here in order to reconcile a contradiction between these two lines of argumentation.

⁶¹ Fredric Jameson, "Future City," in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2008), 563.

⁶² Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Press, 1947), 501.

⁶³ PS, 75.

⁶⁴ UR, 40.

To Lefebvre, many urban areas are not identical, but they do resemble one another. As he would put it, “[t]he space that homogenizes thus has nothing homogenous about it.”⁶⁵

Hausmann’s influence is global in scope but there is no space that is identical to the one he created. The above passage from Giedeon’s text on Hausmann’s influence can be supplemented by David Harvey who, too, has sketched a direct line of influence, albeit using much more concrete examples. Harvey writes:

There is a strong connecting thread from Hausmann’s re-shaping of Paris in the 1860s through the ‘garden city’ proposals of Ebenezer Howard (1898), Daniel Burnham (the ‘White City’ constructed for the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 and the Chicago Regional Plan of 1907), Garnier (the linear industrial city of 1903), Camillo Sitte and Otto Wagner (with quite different plans to transform *fin de siècle* Vienna), Le Corbusier (*The city of tomorrow* and the *Plan Voisin* proposal for Paris of 1924), Frank Lloyd Wright (the Broadacre project of 1935) to the large-scale urban renewal efforts undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s in the spirit of high modernism.⁶⁶

The allusion to a connecting thread remains unspecified by Harvey. So what is the thread Harvey refers to? The predominant use of the right angle is certainly an overt possibility, but the less obvious possibility is the experience of boredom shared amongst those who inhabit those spaces, as well as by the critics who assess them. Below, I will attempt to demonstrate the parallels between Hausmann’s vision for Paris and one of the abovementioned urbanists, Le Corbusier. For now, it is important to note that Le Corbusier was an admirer of Hausmann, one who was deeply influenced by the straight streets in the Baron’s design. Referring to the benefits of streets with right-angles in Paris, Le Corbusier argues:

Your mind is free instead of being given over every minute to the complicated game imposed on it by the puzzle of our European cities. Do you want to go from your home to the Opera, to Père-Lachaise, to the Luxembourg Museum, or to the Eiffel Tower? First get the city plan out of your drawer and look for the route. It

⁶⁵ PS, 308.

⁶⁶ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 25-26.

is a task. Old gentlemen will pretend to discover in that the charm of Paris. I do not agree; nevertheless I accept the inconvenience imposed by the very history of the city; on my way I thank Louix XIV, Napoleon, and Haussmann for having cut through the city with some clear and intelligent axes.⁶⁷

This ‘free mind’ means one does not have to think about where one is going to the same extent as one had to in the past. In this sense, the influence of Haussmann’s design as a truly global one becomes apparent. As Edward Relph notes, the twentieth century may have inaugurated the first era in all of history where people can survive and flourish without having a shred of “first-hand knowledge of their surroundings.”⁶⁸ Today, Global Positioning Systems in the process of becoming standard features in both cars much to the convenience of their drivers as well as in the smart phones of pedestrians. Due in no small part to the general ideology imparted by Haussmann and his plan, people are requiring less and less first-hand knowledge of their surroundings in order to go about their everyday lives.⁶⁹

To end this section, it should be noted that cities are often designed to forestall boredom. If one is bored in the city, such as the Situationists claimed to be, it is merely an unintended consequence. No one designs an urban space in order to bore people. The American geographer Edward Soja, heavily influenced by Lefebvre’s work, draws a distinction between two types of cities and how they are constructed for dealing with boredom. Without Soja stating as much, the two types can roughly be described as vibrant on the one hand and dull on the other. Or, for the present purposes, they are a city

⁶⁷ Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals Were White*, trans. Francis E. Hyslop, Jr. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 47.

⁶⁸ Edward Relph, “Preface,” In *The Modern Urban Landscape* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1987), np.

⁶⁹ I am not here linking Haussmann’s influence directly to the production of global positioning systems. What I am linking is Haussmann’s influence to the ideological demand for not thinking about where one is going in a given space.

that has been built properly to not induce boredom and one that struggles to combat boredom.

Amsterdam's center feels like an open public forum, a daily festival of spontaneous political and cultural ideas played at a low key, but all the more effective for its lack of pretense and frenzy. Its often erogenously zoned geography is attuned to many different age groups and civically dedicated to the playful conquest of boredom and despair in ways that most other cities have forgotten or never thought possible. Downtown Los Angeles, on the other hand, is almost pure spectacle, of business and commerce, of extreme wealth and poverty, of clashing cultures and rigidly contained ethnicities. Boredom is assuaged by overindulgence and the bombardment of artificial stimulation; while despair is controlled and contained by the omnipresence of authority and spatial surveillance, the ultimate in the substitution of police for *polis*.⁷⁰

Based on this description, downtown Amsterdam appears to be a space which requires little effort to enjoy. Downtown Los Angeles, on the contrary, seems to require a great deal of persistent effort in order to 'assuage' boredom. Referring to California in general, Baudrillard writes:

What is hardest is that, in this idealized universe, it is not permissible to be bored. The need to preserve this paradisiac reputation (much more than happiness itself) obviously makes life twice as difficult. There is an extraordinary pressure of collective responsibility. All new arrivals conform immediately; the solidarity is total. The Californians are committed to a job of advertising just as ascetic as the task of the Mormons with whom they share a geographical and mental space. They are a huge sect devoted to proving happiness, as others have dedicated themselves to the greater glory of God.⁷¹

The goal, then, in California in general and Los Angeles in particular is to have the appearance of happiness regardless of one's boredom. Money, in this formulation, would seem essential for keeping boredom at bay in a city such as Los Angeles. In order to examine this further, I will now turn away from the spatial arrangement of city planners to the spatial usage of everyday people in the city.

⁷⁰ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 297.

⁷¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories II*, 41.

The Street: Freezing Metropolitan Blaséness

As was mentioned at the end of the last chapter, for Lefebvre, the street is a microcosm of everyday life. For him, the street “epitomizes the modern city.”⁷² It is in the street where the city and everyday life shine brightest. Other continental scholars such as Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel have this thought in common with Lefebvre, although, unlike Benjamin and Simmel, Lefebvre does not have an ideal type of urban occupant strolling through the streets.⁷³ Benjamin’s is the *flâneur* and Simmel’s is the blasé personality. While these are different labels, these two figures are not so different. Fran Tonkiss has sketched some commonalities between these two figures. “Distracted by the urban spectacle even as he is estranged from it,” writes Tonkiss, “the bored desire of the *flâneur* bears a likeness to Simmel’s jaded metropolitan, battered to the point of the blasé.”⁷⁴ Aside from sharing the desire to assert themselves as pedestrians, these two figures are both plagued by seemingly perpetual fits of boredom. To Tonkiss, the *flâneur* and the blasé personality both “exemplify an ambivalent mode of being in the modern city which combines emersion with estrangement, consumption with detachment, desire with boredom. He is always ‘just looking’.”⁷⁵ In a certain sense, this is passive observation in that these figures are not actively participating in the activities taking place in the immediate surroundings. In another sense, it is an active observation where they are much more in tune with what is happening in their surroundings than the ones who are participating in the activities. It is both active and passive at the same time. It would

⁷² CEL 2, 309.

⁷³ Lefebvre was not averse to such a maneuver, as he did construct a fairly elaborate typology of various types of people that can be found throughout everyday life. See *Ibid.*, 266-272.

⁷⁴ Fran Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 126.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

seem as though the blasé personality is developed by being both present and absent in the city.

In what Fredric Jameson has called a “seminal essay,”⁷⁶ ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ by Georg Simmel offers the best and perhaps most famous example of blaséness. This “peculiarly modern form of boredom”⁷⁷ is what one develops through the constant process of mediation in the metropolis best exemplified by the impersonal exchange of money.⁷⁸ Simmel writes of “the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance. And the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates.”⁷⁹ But cities have been around much longer than modernity has, why would a blasé personality suddenly develop? To Simmel, it is the modern metropolis, which is historically specific, that is of concern to him. Anthony Giddens glosses the difference between the modern metropolis and cities of the past when he writes how “modern urbanism is ordered according to quite different principles from those which set off the pre-modern city from the countryside in prior periods.”⁸⁰ One of these principles is the money economy of capitalism. Simmel notes how “the metropolis has always been the

⁷⁶ Fredric Jameson, “The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism, and Land Speculation,” In *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso Press, 1998), 165.

⁷⁷ Patrice Petro, “After Shock/Between Boredom and History,” *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1995), 273.

⁷⁸ Regarding the money economy, or capitalism, Klapp believes no “particular content of ideology appear to have much to do with the prevalence of boredom.” *Overload and Boredom*, 22. Agnes Repplier, writing in 1893, claims a socialist “dreams of preparing for all of us a lifetime of unbroken ennui.” In “Ennui,” *Essays in Idleness*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1893), 167.

⁷⁹ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” In *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 175. Simmel wrote this essay in 1903 about his experiences in Europe, while four years later in 1907 Maxim Gorky wrote in a similar vein about his trip to Coney Island, New York where he noticed the people there were suffering from a “boredom [that] deafens their ears and blinds their eyes.” Maxim Gorky, “Boredom,” In *Writing New York: a Literary Anthology*, ed. Phillip Lopate (New York: Library of America, 2008), 358.

⁸⁰ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 6

seat of the money economy,”⁸¹ but it is the capitalist one that is of concern to him. But what does this have to do with the blasé attitude? Simmel continues by saying how “the immense growth of the monetary-industrial complex also brought with it the modern city [...] the megalopolis whose uncontrollable cellular division and spread now threatens to choke so much of our lives.”⁸² Specifically, money is the key culprit for blaséness because it “reduces all quality and individuality to the question: How much?”⁸³ Money,⁸⁴ then, is a leveller of difference where everyone requires it to sustain oneself.⁸⁵ That is, we all need money to buy food, clothes, shelter, etc. Of course, the amount of money people possess is not levelled. “Money,” observes Simmel, “with all its colourlessness and indifference, becomes the common denominator of all values.”⁸⁶ Lefebvre referred to money as the “arch-sorcerer of the Western world.”⁸⁷ It conjures up hopes and dreams seemingly out of thin air. It can make things appear or disappear. It has cast a spell on many who relentlessly pursue it as if to replicate the machinery which produces it. The mediation of money in the metropolis, so widespread throughout the world, is believed to be the chief cause of the blasé personality.

Blaséness is characterized by Simmel as a ‘mood’. Elizabeth Goodstein claims it is “a mental attitude associated with the experience of boredom in relation to the historical and cultural circumstances of urban existence.”⁸⁸ Simmel believes that “this mood is the faithful subjective reflection of the completely internalized money

⁸¹ Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 176.

⁸² Steiner, “The Great Ennui,” 18.

⁸³ Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 176.

⁸⁴ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner note how “money usurps the place of God in the secular world of modernity and is worshipped by nearly all.” *The Postmodern Turn*, 47.

⁸⁵ Interestingly enough, Lars Svendsen argues “leveling creates boredom.” *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 71.

⁸⁶ Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 178.

⁸⁷ CEL 1, 121.

⁸⁸ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 264.

economy.”⁸⁹ Here, reflection is meant in the sense that it mirrors, rather than the reflection of deep thinking, or to reflect in a philosophical sense. The money economy ensures that encounters in the metropolis are certainly impersonal, “for entirely unknown purchasers who never personally enter the producer’s actual field of vision.”⁹⁰ Simmel is here emphasizing the lack of familiarity in the exchange of goods and services. That is, although the situation of exchange is one that can be found throughout the metropolis and is therefore quite familiar, the inter-subjective interaction is relatively hollow and customers and vendors both simply go through the motions in order to complete a transaction. Neither side seems to enjoy the moment. There is always something else in the future or even in the past that is more desirable. It is only a means to an end. Along these lines, George Steiner writes: “The urban inferno, with its hordes of faceless inhabitants, haunts the nineteenth-century imagination.”⁹¹ These faceless inhabitants roughly echo Simmel’s assessment of the blasé personality. Further to this point, Raymond Williams has mentioned two scenarios often taking place in the metropolitan settings of English literature. They are two sides of the same coin, either the crowd full of strangers or the lonely individual in the crowd.⁹² Both scenarios are consistent with the faceless and nameless mass of people Steiner refers to. While Williams’s example is one of fiction, it is based on the authors’ observations of the actually existing movement throughout the metropolis.

With the blasé personality, there is a shift in the logic of everyday life that becomes most apparent with an examination of a rationalized urban space. Over the

⁸⁹ Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 178.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁹¹ Steiner, “The Great Ennui,” 19.

⁹² Raymond Williams, “Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism,” *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso Press, 2007), 40.

course of time, the “modern mind,” according to Simmel, “has become more and more calculating.”⁹³ Simmel’s fellow philosophical countryman Martin Heidegger would certainly agree with this. It should be noted that Heidegger also briefly mentions blaséness in his lectures on boredom,⁹⁴ but does not refer to Simmel or the money economy. The common thread between these two thinkers is not found in those lectures, but is instead present in Heidegger’s ‘Memorial Address’ from October 30th 1955, where he differentiates between two kinds of thinking in the modern world: calculative and meditative. The former type of thinking, “computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself.”⁹⁵ With the subsequent advent of computers, it would seem as though both Heidegger and Simmel were prophetic in their assessment of calculative thinking. Meditative thinking, on the contrary, constantly ‘collects itself’, evaluates and re-evaluates, pauses, carries on, turns back, is careful, deliberate and comparatively slow. These two modes of thinking are opposed to one another.

If calculative thinking is day, then meditative thinking is night.⁹⁶ It can be said that there is a certain sort of coldness with this calculating mind. The familiar saying ‘cold and calculating’⁹⁷ is relevant here for linking Simmel and Heidegger with

⁹³ Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 177.

⁹⁴ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 110.

⁹⁵ Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper, 1966), 46.

⁹⁶ For meditative thought’s association with night, Hegel’s well-known metaphor for philosophy, the owl of Minerva, is perhaps relevant here. Where, for Hegel, philosophy always arrives on the scene too late is exemplified by the image of Minerva’s owl taking flight at dusk G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.

⁹⁷ If calculative thinking is ‘cold’, it is reasonable to describe meditative thinking as ‘warm’. After all, according to Bertrand Russell, it was none other than the meditative thinker par excellence, Descartes, who would climb into a warm stove in order to meditate. *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 512. Although, on the same page, Russell also mentions that “Socrates used to meditate all day in the snow,” which creates some doubt for equating warmth with meditation. As well, calculative thinking in the case of modern urban planners stems from Descartes’ influence. Perhaps, the two, meditative and

Lefebvre. In his book *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Lefebvre argues in an implicit way that calculative thinking (the greater the coldness of calculative thinking, the closer its approaches a 'zero point') can never be fully realized:

Zero point is the lowest point of social experience, a point that can only be approached and never reached, the point of total cold; it is made up of partial zero points – space, time, objects, speech, needs. A kind of intellectual and social asceticism can be discerned at zero point under all the apparent affluence, the squandering and ostentation as well as under their opposites, economic rationality, resistance. Moreover it can be held responsible for the decline of the Festival, of style and works of art; or rather it is the sum of features and properties resulting from their decline. In fact zero point defines everyday life – except for desire that lives and survives in the quotidian.⁹⁸

Calculative thinking is the general logic behind and perpetuated throughout everyday life that leads to the decline of the Festival, of style, of works of art, etc., because these are all superfluous activities that do not contribute to the money economy or the linear way of being that governs the modern world. To Lefebvre, this rationalized manner of living is the opposite of a work of art and is the reason why everyday life is not a work of art. This rationalized thinking is a general feature of modernity, but is highly concentrated in a metropolis. Lefebvre writes:

Maybe our description of this 'freezing' landscape is misleading, for it has nothing in common with an ice-age scene; it is merely a picture of boredom. On the other hand we all know only too well the dangers inherent in the boredom eating away at the heart of modernity. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that whole nations are bored, while others are sinking into a boredom at zero point. We can say that people are satisfied, happy ...; of course they are, for they have come to accept and even to like boredom at 'zero point'; they prefer it to hazards of desire.⁹⁹

The widespread shift towards calculative thinking as a general logic of modernity, then, is a 'picture of boredom'. The blasé attitude, though often concealing such boredom,

calculative thinking, as (ab)used by urban planners, can both be traced back to Descartes, at least his influence.

⁹⁸ ELMW, 185-186.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

wears a mask of satisfaction and happiness. With a pervasive emphasis on calculative thinking, what is missing is quality of life.

With the blasé attitude, quantification is valued above all else. That is to say, quantity is valued more than quality. Everything is measured in price and duration of time. ‘How much is it going to cost?’ or ‘how long is it going to take?’ are frequent questions heard throughout the metropolis and can confirm this point, perhaps even together, such as with a ride in a taxi. The clichéd¹⁰⁰ saying ‘time is money’ seems to apply to this and it is on this point where another commonality exists between Lefebvre and Simmel. Lefebvre writes:

Since time can apparently be assessed in terms of money, however, since it can be bought and sold just like any object (‘time is money’), little wonder that it disappears after the fashion of an object. At which point it is no longer even a dimension of space, but merely an incomprehensible scribble or scrawl that a moment’s work can completely rub out. It is reasonable to ask if this expulsion or erasure of time is directed at historical time. The answer is: certainly, but only for symbolic purposes. It is, rather, the time needed for living, time as an irreducible good, which eludes the logic of visualization and spatialization (if indeed one may speak of logic in this context). Time may have been promoted to the level of ontology by the philosophers, but it has been murdered by society.¹⁰¹

Here, the distinction between meditative and calculative thinking is demonstrated. While this passage may seem to be a tad hyperbolic, Lefebvre’s point is a penetrating one. On the one hand, time is an important philosophical problem and on the other hand its importance is glossed over by many non-philosophers. Much the same as with space, time is of serious concern for a relative few despite the fact that both categories apply to all.

¹⁰⁰ For a study that examines the relationship between boredom and clichés, see Anton C. Zijderfeld, “Clichés and Boredom: the Supersedure of Meaning by Function in the Experience of Time,” In *On Clichés: the Supersedure of Meaning by Function in Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1979), 75-87.

¹⁰¹ PS, 96.

While space is a shared facet between Lefebvre and Simmel's respective work, time is also an important facet for the depiction of the modern world located in the work of each thinker. Lefebvre's category of linear time mentioned in the last chapter can be seen in Simmel's observation of "the universal diffusion of pocket watches."¹⁰² To Simmel, the profusion of pocket watches "symbolizes subjective adaptation to the highly rationalized form of metropolitan life."¹⁰³ This rationalization is evident in the multitude of time schedules such as those for work, department store hours, movie show times, or those found at a train station, all of which altered everyday life. It is important here to reiterate the interconnectedness of time and space. In his *Production of Space*, Lefebvre articulates this over the course of a lengthy passage:

With the advent of modernity time has vanished from social space. It is recorded solely on measuring-instruments, on clocks, that are as isolated and functionally specialized as this time itself. Lived time loses its form and its social interest – with the exception, that is, of time spent working. Economic space subordinates time to itself; political space expels it as threatening and dangerous (to power). The primacy of the economic and above all of the political implies the supremacy of space over time. It is thus possible that the error concerning space that we have been discussing actually concerns time more directly, more intimately, than it does space, time being even closer to us, and more fundamental. Our time, then, this most essential part of lived experience, this greatest good of all goods, is no longer visible to us, no longer intelligible. It cannot be constructed. It is consumed, exhausted, and that is all. It leaves no traces. It is concealed in space, hidden under a pile of debris to be disposed of as soon as possible; after all, rubbish is a pollutant.¹⁰⁴

Lefebvre here articulates a dialectical relationship between the widespread presence of time pieces along with the concurrent absence of time's intelligibility. It would perhaps only be mysterious if all of the time pieces were removed from society, such as Simmel theorizes:

¹⁰² Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 250.

¹⁰³ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 271.

¹⁰⁴ PS, 95-96.

If all clocks and watches in Berlin would suddenly go wrong in different ways, even if only by one hour, all economic life and communication of the city would be disrupted for a long time. In addition, an apparently mere external factor – long distances – would make all waiting and broken appointments result in an ill-afforded waste of time. Thus, the technique of metropolitan life is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule.¹⁰⁵

Time is an important aspect of the blasé attitude. It must be emphasized that this is not an obscure or rare attitude. Simmel would claim that “there is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which has been so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as has the blasé attitude. The blasé attitude results first from the rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves.”¹⁰⁶ This effectively defines how the blasé attitude appears as well as how prevalent it is in the metropolis. Simmel continues by mentioning how “a life in boundless pursuit of pleasure makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all.”¹⁰⁷ Such a boundless pursuit is thought to be doomed to failure from the beginning.

Simmel’s concept of the blasé attitude is best summarized by Goodstein who argues that it “represent[s] an historically significant adaptation to modern life.”¹⁰⁸ Seán Desmond Healy would agree with Goodstein’s assessment, though he notes that “one might have supposed exactly the opposite, given the vastly more numerous diversions and entertainments.”¹⁰⁹ It is with this in mind where it becomes interesting to contrast Simmel’s position with Bertrand Russell’s, mentioned in the first section of the first chapter.

¹⁰⁵ Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 177.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 265.

¹⁰⁹ Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 15.

Whereas Simmel advocates the proliferation of the blasé personality as being concurrent with the spreading of metropolises, Russell's argument clearly goes in the other direction. That is, Russell believes that people were bored in the rural areas before the 'double process' of industrialization and urbanization took over as the dominant structures of society. As was mentioned in the first section of the first chapter, Russell argues that there are simply too many distractions and stimulations (amusements) available in the metropolis to become bored, none of which were available to the folks in rural areas. To Russell, there was little stimulation in pre-modern times and, therefore, there had to be a mass diffusion of boredom. Russell's position is a commonsensical one, much the same as the other intellectual mentioned in the same section, Joseph Brodsky. Recall the discussion in the first chapter regarding Brodsky's linear causal chain: money–time–repetition–boredom. These four items are all present in Simmel's blasé attitude. One difference is Simmel specifically uses the city as an example, whereas Brodsky does not. Conversely, Russell does actually make mention of the relationship between the urban and boredom. Of note is Russell's view that "the special kind of boredom from which modern urban populations suffer is intimately bound up with their separation from the life of Earth."¹¹⁰ This is particularly puzzling considering Russell claimed that boredom has diminished in the machine age. Russell makes the case for the incredible boredom of the past when people were much more connected to the Earth and then makes the claim that a lack of connection to the Earth is what causes one form of boredom. Earlier in his essay Russell wrote that "[w]e are less bored than our ancestors were, but we are more afraid of boredom."¹¹¹ Essentially, we have a fear of boredom, but do not

¹¹⁰Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, 67-68.

¹¹¹Ibid., 60.

experience it as much. Although they arrive at different conclusions, both Simmel and Russell share the idea that something unique happened with the advent of the machine age.

Architecture: Machines for Living In

In contrast to many urban critics who place an enormous amount of value on the street, it has been said that the Swiss architect and city planner Le Corbusier (né Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) “longs to abolish the street.”¹¹² His primary focus was buildings and the spaces between them were secondary. One of the most notorious and influential architects of the twentieth century, Le Corbusier was one of the path breaking figures in architectural modernism. His infamous phrase that “a house is a machine for living in”¹¹³ would prove to be a cornerstone of his legacy. Several years after expressing this sentiment, in 1943 Le Corbusier admitted that he “was never forgiven for that expression.”¹¹⁴ Despite his insistence on the strictly functional aspects of the home, Le Corbusier was sensitive to the boredom experienced by countless individuals in such a space. In his book *Towards a New Architecture*, the same book featuring the comment about ‘machines for living’, Le Corbusier outlines the problem of boredom:

[T]he modern man is bored to tears in his home; so he goes to his club. The modern woman is bored outside her boudoir; she goes to tea-parties. The modern man and woman are bored at home; they go to night-clubs. But lesser folk who have no clubs gather together in the evening under the chandelier and hardly dare to walk through the labyrinth of their furniture which takes up the whole room and is all their fortune and their pride.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Lettrist International, “Skyscrapers by the Roots,” In *The Situationists and the City*, ed. Tom McDonough (London: Verso Press, 2009), 44.

¹¹³ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), 95.

¹¹⁴ Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier Talks with Students: From the Schools of Architecture*, trans. Pierre Chase (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 26.

¹¹⁵ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 120-122.

In Le Corbusier's view, emotions are rooted in architecture. How one feels is dependent on where one is, which space one dwells in. The boredom of the modern man and modern woman is rooted in the boringness of the architecture of their homes. To Le Corbusier, this could be remedied with an architecture that reflected the demands of modernity and facilitated its flow. To him, architecture is "an admirable thing, the loveliest of all. A product of happy peoples and a thing which in itself produces happy peoples."¹¹⁶ Further to this, he believed that "the business of architecture is to establish emotional relationships by means of raw materials."¹¹⁷ These emotional relationships were to extend far beyond the space of the home, as Le Corbusier envisioned a better society through better architecture. It would begin with buildings and extend out to the surrounding city. The basic formula is: "The happy towns are those that have an architecture."¹¹⁸ The final two sentences of his book *Towards a New Architecture* are "Architecture or revolution. Revolution can be avoided."¹¹⁹ In order to preempt unrest or dissatisfaction amongst its inhabitants, the city, or society more generally, would require modern architecture, specifically Le Corbusier's architecture.

Le Corbusier strove to be *the* architect of modernity and he was largely successful at achieving this goal. Lefebvre once described him as "the most celebrated architect and town planner of modern times."¹²⁰ This statement is geared towards Le Corbusier's overall reception and not Lefebvre's overall view. Lefebvre's position can be contrasted with Le Corbusier's theory that "our epoch is fixing its own style day by day. It is there

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 289.

¹²⁰ Lefebvre, "Preface," *Lived-in Architecture*, np.

under our eyes. Eyes which do not see.”¹²¹ Whereas Lefebvre would say there is an absence of style, Le Corbusier would say the style is there, it is just beneath one’s attention. This can be contrasted with another passage of Lefebvre’s on Le Corbusier where he assures readers that he “was a good architect, but a catastrophic urbanist.”¹²² Lefebvre characterized Le Corbusier’s supposed style and the one that is ‘fixing itself day by day’ as “the dictatorship of the right angle.”¹²³ As was seen above in the case of Haussmann, for urban planners the right angle results in straight streets, which Le Corbusier acknowledged are boring for pedestrians to walk in, but are at the same time are efficient for automobiles. Le Corbusier would rather have a straight street to facilitate the flow of business than fabricate curved streets that would be enjoyable to walk in. This is not to say that Le Corbusier was insensitive to leisure activities as a whole, they were simply subordinate to the speed of automobiles and business. Le Corbusier likened the curved road to the ‘Pack-Donkey’s Way’. Conversely, the straight road was the way of the future, the way of modernity. The Pack-Donkey wanders aimlessly, whereas the man of modernity “walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going.”¹²⁴ Curved streets are imprecise relics of the past; straight streets are rational achievements of modernity. The straight street was to reflect Le Corbusier’s view that “the modern sentiment is the spirit of geometry.”¹²⁵ He acknowledged that while boredom may lie in wait for pedestrians walking these streets, but they accommodate automobiles. He believed the appropriate solution to accommodating business and

¹²¹ Le Corbusier, *Towards an Architecture*, 95.

¹²² WC, 207.

¹²³ UR, 109.

¹²⁴ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

leisure was to separate business and automobiles from pedestrians and leisure by having specific spaces for each.¹²⁶ Much like houses were ‘machines for living in’, the street was a “traffic machine” for Le Corbusier which he felt ought to be “as well equipped in its way as a factory.”¹²⁷

Lefebvre and Le Corbusier approached the city from different points of view. Lefebvre comes from an academic, philosophical position, whereas Le Corbusier’s perspective was fashioned much more by practical, empirical work in spatial design. Both were, however, concerned above all else with everyday life. Le Corbusier once wrote in reference to the tasks facing planners that “what we must do, therefore, is to study *modern man’s daily existence*.”¹²⁸ Based on this limited information it would appear as though he and Lefebvre are kindred spirits. After all, Lefebvre is the ‘quintessential theorist of everyday life’. However, dig a little bit into Lefebvre’s book *The Production of Space* and one finds several unambiguous statements that set him apart from Le Corbusier. For example, Lefebvre writes: “Surely it is the supreme illusion to defer to architects, urbanists or planners as being experts or ultimate authorities in matter relating to space.”¹²⁹ This clearly applies to architects and urban planners in general, but especially to Le Corbusier in particular. In his book *The Survival of Capitalism*, Lefebvre also argued that “the urban has no worse enemy than urban planning and ‘urbanism’, which is capitalism’s and the state’s strategic instrument for the manipulation of

¹²⁶ Ibid., 208.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹²⁸ Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of our Machine-Age Civilization* (New York: The Orion Press, 1967), 69.

¹²⁹ PS, 95.

fragmented urban reality and the production of controlled space.”¹³⁰ Lefebvre elaborated this thought in his earlier text *The Urban Revolution*:

The architect who draws and the urbanist who composes a block plan look down on their “object,” buildings and neighborhoods, from above and afar. The designers and draftsmen move within a space of paper and ink. Only after this nearly complete reduction of the everyday do they return to the scale of lived experienced.¹³¹

While Le Corbusier wished to study everyday life, he nevertheless fell well short in Lefebvre’s eyes. Everyday life is exactly what suffers when it is regulated, at least when it is attempted to be regulated, by functionalist planners.

Not surprisingly, David Harvey sides with Lefebvre on this matter when he argues that “a planner-architect like Le Corbusier, or an administrator like Haussmann, creates a built environment in which the tyranny of the straight line predominates, then we must perforce adjust our daily practices.”¹³² Harvey is here claiming that the design of an urban space impacts the routines and routes of everyday life. Constant Nieuwenhuys, a member of the Situationist International, would agree with Lefebvre and Harvey when he writes:

In response to the need to construct whole towns rapidly, cemeteries in reinforced concrete are being built where great masses of the population are condemned to die of boredom. For what is the use of the most astonishing technical inventions that the world now finds at its disposal if the conditions for deriving benefit from them are lacking, they contribute nothing to leisure, and the imagination defaults?¹³³

Le Corbusier is a particularly important figure for discussing the relationship between boredom and the urban. Not only because he is one of the most influential urbanists of

¹³⁰ SC, 15.

¹³¹ UR, 182.

¹³² David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 204.

¹³³ Constant, “A Different City for a Different Life,” In *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 95.

all time, but because, oddly enough, Le Corbusier sought to eliminate boredom from urban spaces. While often accused of (such as in the case of Constant) imposing boredom on those who walk in his streets, or live in his buildings, Le Corbusier was adamant that boredom should be excluded from the urban. In his book *The City of To-Morrow and its Planning*, Le Corbusier makes it clear when he writes that “there must never come a time when people can be bored in our city.”¹³⁴ This was his vision, to eliminate boredom via urban planning and architectural design. His major weapons were the straight lines on a Cartesian plane, the very same he acknowledged as boring to walk in.¹³⁵ However, what he also believed was that too much interest in the street would also lead to boredom. He argued that “[p]icturesqueness is a pleasure which quickly becomes boring if too frequently gratified.”¹³⁶ It would seem that, for Le Corbusier, both straight streets and ‘picturesque’ streets lead to boredom, so they, in a sense, cancel one another out.

Perhaps Le Corbusier sought to expunge cities of boredom because he was so often afflicted by this experience in his early life. This is exemplified in a letter written December 2nd, 1910 to his parents, where Le Corbusier sums up his overall experience working for the German architect Peter Behrens in the city of Berlin:

As for me, what sickens me most is not being able to get well. Each day begins by opening a big hole in front of me and dropping me into it because I thought I wasn’t being an idiot, which I am, and in a way that’s disgustingly and unacceptably unfair. Of course it’s my own fault, but my sickness is right there mocking me, frustrating me. You no longer understand such a creature, my dear parents, nor do I. I’ve given up – first victory, or already a first defeat: trying to analyse why. It’s all summed up in a single word of two syllables: Boredom.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, 238.

¹³⁵ He would write that “the right angle is the essential and sufficient implement of action, because it enables us to determine space with an absolute exactness.” Ibid., 13.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 210.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Nicholas Fox Weber, *Le Corbusier: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 76.

This letter contains several points which should appear ironic if considered in tandem with the criticism leveled at Le Corbusier's work. Le Corbusier's everyday life was one that was often filled with boredom, a boredom which he considers a type of 'sickness'. No wonder that he, as what could be called a doctor of space, tried to cure the boredom of the city with urban design and architecture. At the time of writing the letter, Le Corbusier was said to have had a "state of mind" that "devolved into a "crisis of profound boredom."¹³⁸ Berlin was not the only city Le Corbusier associated with boredom. In another letter to his parents, written in November 17, 1907, Le Corbusier complained about the boredom of Vienna. He writes: "Sad day; no purpose whatever, mortal boredom; one rages, one rears up, one is a tiny angry god in solitary combat against this mocking inert mass, the inexorable indifference of the big city."¹³⁹ To Le Corbusier, the modern city, described above as a 'mocking inert mass', needed to be transformed into something that meshed with the symbol of the modern age, the machine. Le Corbusier's boredom with urban design was a catalyst for his machine aesthetic. However, a machine aesthetic is bound to be repetitive if it is to remain deserving of the name. Lefebvre notes the problems associated with this type of design:

A homogeneous and utterly simultaneous space would be strictly imperceptible. It would lack the conflictual component (always resolved, but always at least suggested) of the contrast between symmetry and asymmetry. It may as well be noted at this juncture that the architectural and urbanistic space of modernity tends precisely towards this homogeneous state of affairs, towards a place of confusion and fusion between geometrical and visual which inspires a kind of physical discomfort. Everything is alike. Localization – and lateralization – are no more. Signifier and signified, marks and markers, are added after the fact – as decorations, so to speak. This reinforces, if possible, the feeling of desertedness, and adds to the malaise.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Ibid., 52.

This modern space has an analogical affinity with the space of the philosophical, and more specifically the Cartesian tradition. Unfortunately it is also the space of blank sheets of paper, drawing-boards, plans, sections, elevations, scale models, geometrical projections and the like.¹⁴⁰

The last line makes mention of ‘blank sheets of paper’. In Le Corbusier’s book *The City of To-Morrow and its Planning*, Le Corbusier reserves a space for what he believes to be an archetypal work of the modern era. Since the space goes unfilled, an empty space persists. What the reader is left with is essentially a blank sheet of paper. But is the blank sheet of paper itself an archetypal work of the modern era? Intentionally or unintentionally, this is telling. The Situationists, those harsh critics of Haussmann, were equally repulsed by Le Corbusier’s approach:

We will leave Monsieur Le Corbusier’s style to him, a style suitable for factories and hospitals, and no doubt for prisons. (Doesn’t he already build churches?) Some sort of psychological repression dominates this individual – whose face is as ugly as his conceptions of the world – such that he wants to squash people under ignoble masses of reinforced concrete, a noble material that should rather be used to enable an aerial articulation of space that could surpass the flamboyant Gothic style. His cretinizing influence is immense. A Le Corbusier model is the only image that arouses in me the idea of immediate suicide. He is destroying the last remnants of joy. And of love, passion, freedom.¹⁴¹

Where to begin with this passage? Le Corbusier would probably take offense to being referred to as having a style,¹⁴² but would most certainly take offense to inducing suicidal thoughts with his designs. By having an ‘immense’ influence, Le Corbusier’s vision lives on in the plans and designs of many others. So, following the logic of the Situationists, Le Corbusier is not only ‘destroying the last remnants of joy’, but so too are those who take a cue from him, or were made, so to speak, from a similar mould.

¹⁴⁰ PS, 200.

¹⁴¹ Chtcheglov, “Formulary for a New Urbanism,” 2.

¹⁴² For example, Le Corbusier wrote that “architecture has nothing to do with the ‘styles’.” *Towards a New Architecture*, 47.

When asked by a New York reporter what he thought of New York's skyscrapers, Le Corbusier exclaimed that the "skyscrapers of New York are too small and there are too many of them."¹⁴³ Le Corbusier, instead, wished to promote his idea of the "Cartesian skyscraper," which "easily reaches a thousand feet," and is "normally vertical, plumb from top to bottom, without setbacks or slopes."¹⁴⁴ The façade is almost all glass, its base should have plenty of green space (away from other skyscrapers), and it could potentially contain anywhere from ten to forty thousand people.¹⁴⁵ Isolated from other buildings, surrounded by green space, the ideal location for Le Corbusier's Cartesian skyscraper in New York would most likely have been Central Park. As influential as Le Corbusier was, and still is, his ideas were/are not always followed. The absence of a skyscraper in Central Park is testament to this. However, there are some occasions when his influence is profound. For example, as Edward Relph notes in his book *The Modern Urban Landscape*, Le Corbusier's fingerprints can be found in Toronto.¹⁴⁶ Relph juxtaposes two images: a design sketch from Le Corbusier's alongside a picture of Highway 427 in Toronto. The similarities are uncanny. It is as if Le Corbusier's drawing has come to life. The two images, the sketch and the photograph, are virtually indistinguishable.

Despite his great influence on people and places alike, Le Corbusier was unable to apply his brand of modernism towards the capital of modernity, though he would have leapt at the chance. He writes: "Paris the Cartesian city, Paris refusing all confusion,

¹⁴³ Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals Were White*, 51, 55.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁴⁶ Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape*, 72.

Paris means clarity.”¹⁴⁷ Le Corbusier admired its Cartesian design, but believed it was not Cartesian enough. A few pages later in the same book he was quick to point out that it needs to evolve with the machine age. “Paris is truly in danger;” writes Le Corbusier, “for if Paris doesn’t move, Paris will become senile.”¹⁴⁸ It just so happens to be the case that Le Corbusier believed he had the answer for solving this problem. Le Corbusier saw the basic need for seamless harmony between home and the urban environment. He once wrote: “*Home* or *city*, it is all the same thing: both are manifestations of the same unity.”¹⁴⁹ At first glance, Le Corbusier’s point may appear to be similar to his critics perspectives, such as Jane Jacobs, who have an intense and unwavering belief in the importance of community and feeling at home in the city. It becomes apparent that Le Corbusier and Jacobs are at odds when one considers what Le Corbusier means by home or city: a machine.

Up to this point the discussion of the urban and boredom has focused on European spaces with one short mention of Toronto and another of Los Angeles. In keeping with the theme stated in the introductory chapter of focusing on Europe and America, the question arises: What about America? Le Corbusier was fond of America. Le Corbusier admired much about what he saw as the American way of life, writing that “there is a style, a true style, in American cleanliness.”¹⁵⁰ What, if any, impact did Le Corbusier have on America? To answer this question it would be beneficial to turn to the work of Jane Jacobs. Why Jacobs? Undoubtedly, she was one of, if not *the* most vocal critics of not only Le Corbusier, but of modern American city planning and architecture. Marshall

¹⁴⁷ Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, 99.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 103.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 104.

¹⁵⁰ Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals Were White*, 46.

Berman believed that “if there is one work that perfectly expresses the modernism of the street in the 1960s, it is Jane Jacobs’ remarkable book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.”¹⁵¹ According to Berman, “all she is doing is talking about her everyday life.”¹⁵² Indeed, Jacobs begins her book by stating that she is simply “writing about common, ordinary things.”¹⁵³ She effectively constructed an “urban montage.”¹⁵⁴ In a certain sense, the book is a tale of 24 hours in the life of Jane Jacobs much the same as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Berman has noted the parallels between Jacobs’ work and Joyce’s work.¹⁵⁵ By talking about her everyday life, Jacobs offers a cornucopia of topics regarding the success and failures, mostly failures, of American cities, specifically city life. Discussing all of the various details and arguments in this book falls well outside the scope of this dissertation. For the present purposes, two themes are of primary importance: streets and dullness. Jacobs emphasizes the importance of streets in a city. She boils it down to the following formula: “If a city’s streets look interesting, the city looks interesting; if they look dull, they city looks dull.”¹⁵⁶ This can be extended by Lefebvre’s assertion that “when the street stops being interesting, so does everyday life.”¹⁵⁷ This is a fundamental point that seemed to escape Le Corbusier and his fellow modernists.

While Jacobs did not go far enough for Lefebvre, where she did go was nevertheless an exemplary condemnation of modern city planning. Much like Berman, Lefebvre also noted the importance of Jacobs’ work:

¹⁵¹ Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, 314.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 315.

¹⁵³ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), 5.

¹⁵⁴ Berman, *All that is Solid Melts Into Air*, 315.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 37.

¹⁵⁷ CEL 2, 310.

As long ago as 1961, Jane Jacobs examined the failures of ‘city planning and rebuilding’ in the United States. In particular, she showed how the destruction of streets and neighbourhoods led to the disappearance of many acquired characteristics of city life – or, rather, characteristics assumed to have been permanently acquired: security, social contact, facility of child-rearing, diversity of relationships, and so on. Jacobs did not go so far as flatly to incriminate neocapitalism, or as to isolate the contradictions immanent to the space produced by capitalism (abstract space). But she did very forcefully demonstrate how destructive this space can be, and specifically how urban space, using the very means apparently intended to create or re-create it, effects its own self-destruction.¹⁵⁸

Jacobs was by no means a Marxist like Lefebvre, though Lefebvre’s note that Jacobs identified cities as carrying the seeds of their own destruction is consistent with Lefebvre’s version of Marxism. What is inconsistent with Lefebvre is contentious issue of the city as a work of art. Jacobs writes: “When we deal with cities we are dealing with life at its most complex and intense. Because this is so, there is a basic esthetic limitation on what can be done with cities: *A city cannot be a work of art.*”¹⁵⁹ This is a point where Lefebvre definitively departs from Jacobs. Quite simply, to Lefebvre, “towns have always been collective works of art.”¹⁶⁰ Despite this, Lefebvre has also noted that “[u]rbanism does not try to model space as a work of art.”¹⁶¹ Clearly, Jacobs does not think it possible, or even desirable for a city to be a work of art, which on this point puts her position closer to the very modernists she condemns. But are Jacobs and Lefebvre speaking the same language when it comes to the phrase ‘work of art’? It may seem as though, yes, they simply have differing views. However, I argue they are much closer in their positions than these two lines make it seem. Where Jacobs and Lefebvre differ is

¹⁵⁸ PS, 364.

¹⁵⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 485.

¹⁶⁰ IM, 279.

¹⁶¹ UR, 180.

when it comes to defining ‘work of art’.¹⁶² Now, to clarify, Lefebvre does not believe that a city is the same kind of work of art as a painting or sculpture. It is much more complex than that. “Obviously,” observes Lefebvre, “a city does not present itself in the same way as a flower, ignorant of its own beauty. It has, after all, been ‘composed’ by people, by well-defined groups. All the same, it has none of the intentional character of an ‘art object’.”¹⁶³ Defined this way, Jacobs may have reconsidered her position on the city as a work of art. The modernists she condemns, on the other hand, would have rejected Lefebvre’s position as it goes against the grain of modernity and its quest for efficiency.

Another thread, mentioned in the first chapter, can be picked up at this point, that of Taylorism. Edward Relph notes that, while it is certainly not obvious, Taylorism was “at the heart” of the development of the urban landscape(s) throughout the twentieth-century.¹⁶⁴ Relph, it should be noted, defines landscapes as “the visual contexts of daily existence.”¹⁶⁵ Although ordinary in appearance, these urban areas, according to Relph, often accused of “lack of grace or style,” have “an almost obsessive concern for efficiency of operation and for scientific management.”¹⁶⁶ The basic idea seems to be to have “cities function as efficiently as factories.”¹⁶⁷ Le Corbusier was, of course, an ardent proponent of Taylorism. Le Corbusier explains in his book *The Radiant City*: “People blame Taylorism. It must be suppressed, they cry. Yet it enables us to do our

¹⁶² In Lefebvre’s case, Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas succinctly describe what is meant by ‘work of art’ and the city: “[I]n Lefebvre’s view, the city as a work of art is the opposite of a simple architectural or aesthetic product. The work of art is valued foremost for the collective relations embedded in it.” In “Recovery and Reappropriation in Lefebvre and Constant,” *Non-Plan* (Oxford, UK: Architectural Press, 2000), 88.

¹⁶³ PS, 74.

¹⁶⁴ Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape*, 93-94.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 75.

work quickly, well, and without fatigue.”¹⁶⁸ To Le Corbusier, then, Taylorism, despite its bad reputation, is an exemplary model. It is just that ordinary people do not seem to recognize its benefits. Le Corbusier’s intentions were noble, as he explains that “from the point of view of the way of life we want, there is no harmony at all as yet.”¹⁶⁹ Harmony was his goal and Taylorism was a means of achieving this goal. If it were up to Le Corbusier, Taylorism would reign supreme throughout all urban areas, from dawn until dusk. This was not realized during his lifetime, but it gradually permeated urban areas, especially in America. Andy Merrifield has noted how the “Taylorist stamp on urban America did eventually spread from hour 1 to hour 24. We see it everywhere today in the sacked downtowns plaguing many cities, hollowed-out spaces devastated by interstate highways, by ‘people movers’ lined with faceless office parks, anodyne shopping malls, bland pedestrian streets.”¹⁷⁰

In his book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, the architect Robert Venturi’s position is described by Vincent Scully in the introduction as “diametrically opposed” to Le Corbusier.¹⁷¹ The basics of this opposition can be found near the beginning of the book when Venturi writes “less is a bore.”¹⁷² This terse phrase should ring a bell for most. Clearly, this is a play on the now clichéd saying ‘less is more’. The object of Venturi’s ridicule is not this well-known platitude so much as it is the well-known architects of the International Style, most notably Le Corbusier, the Bauhaus, especially its founder Walter Gropius, as well as Mies van der Rohe. According to

¹⁶⁸ Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, 151.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁷⁰ Merrifield, *Metromarxism*, 180.

¹⁷¹ Robert Scully, “Introduction,” In Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 12.

¹⁷² Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 25.

Edward Relph, this style, also known as International Modernism, “was to become the overwhelmingly dominant architectural style in the urban landscapes of the 1960s and 1970s.”¹⁷³ The phrase ‘less is more’ was actually Mies van der Rohe’s architectural mantra, which Venturi describes as a “magnificent paradox.”¹⁷⁴ Mies, as he is often affectionately referred to, embraced simplicity, precision, and function, all the while detesting ornamentation much the same as Le Corbusier.¹⁷⁵ Ornaments are utterly superfluous to both architects and should be discarded. Such additions or inclusions to buildings were viewed as unnecessary and ostentatious. Ornaments added to the complexity of a building, which Venturi is quick to note, both architects were not interested in.¹⁷⁶ According to Robert Venturi et al., a common thread throughout Modern architecture is the effort to distinguish itself from painting, sculpture, and graphics.¹⁷⁷

By limiting itself to strident articulations of the pure architectural elements of space, structure, and program, Modern architecture’s expression has become a dry expressionism, empty and boring – and in the end irresponsible. Ironically, the Modern architecture of today, while rejecting explicit symbolism and frivolous appliqué ornament, has distorted the whole building into one big ornament.¹⁷⁸

With this the emphasis on function takes the lead over aesthetics. Eliminating any trace of resembling a work of art, architectural modernists instead move toward machines as a basic blueprint for their buildings. While specifically referring to architecture, Charles Jencks argues that “[e]very movement has its weakness. That of Modernism was mass-produced boredom, the machine aesthetic repeating itself endlessly.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape*, 118.

¹⁷⁴ Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 24.

¹⁷⁵ Despite being a critic of these two modernist architects, Lefebvre’s thought shares some ground with them, as he argued that ornaments are “sorry caricature of the work of art.” CEL 2, 206.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷⁸ Robert Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas*, 103.

¹⁷⁹ Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture*, 151.

Modernist architects in the International Style mould were, essentially, avoiding the two concepts in the title to Venturi's book: complexity and contradiction. Simplicity and continuity were valued above all else, thus inevitably leading to an emphasis on function. As Relph notes, such a stance toward architecture was shared by many modernists.

A hallmark of modernism is the lack of ornament and decoration. In modernist cityscapes this means that there is not handmade detail, no evidence of craftsmanship to draw and to hold our attention, except perhaps for the occasional graffito on a blank wall. Colours range through the limited palate of pale greens and browns to metallic and concrete greys. Textures are smooth like glass, or rough like concrete aggregate, in neither case especially pleasant to touch. Put bluntly – unornamented modernism is boring.¹⁸⁰

It is not a stretch to see greyness everywhere, because the 'double process' of industrialization and urbanization ensures that *it is* everywhere. Pollution from cars and factories colour the sky grey much the same as the concrete on the ground. Utilizing concrete may be functional, inexpensive, and practical, but it is deadly boring to look at, walk on, and to be surrounded by. Believing that grey is surrounding him, the Situationist, Raoul Vaneigem, wrote that "there is an incredible dullness in everything having to do with urbanism."¹⁸¹ This is similar to Jane Jacobs' lament of what she calls the 'Great Blight of Dullness' found throughout the cities of America.¹⁸² Vaneigem's frustration was emblematic of those who advocated a wholesale change in urban thinking, design, and implementation. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner elaborate on this point:

Modern architecture is admirable in its utopian impulses, its emphasis on social relevance, and its drive to build a better world. Some of its best work by Wright,

¹⁸⁰ Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape*, 249.

¹⁸¹ Raoul Vaneigem, "Comments Against Urbanism," *October* 79 (Winter, 1997), 125. This line is the inspiration for the title of this chapter.

¹⁸² Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 43.

Le Corbusier, Gropius, and Mies is still extremely impressive, but it congealed into a deadening orthodoxy, in the service of corporate capital, that produced boring buildings and unlivable cities. This orthodoxy violated the very spirit of modernism, which extolled creativity, innovation, and a constant drive to “make it new.” The emphasis on innovation in postmodern architecture, its historicism, eclecticism, and return to ornamentation, surely represents a positive step forward in comparison to the orthodoxy of the International Style. But postmodern architecture fell prey to ludic excess, to banal eclecticism and bad taste, and itself became repetitive, predictable, and boring, leading some to call for a revival of modernism.¹⁸³

With this, the epitome of modernist architecture, embodied in the International Style of Le Corbusier and his brethren, was found to be so boring and predictable that it inspired what came to be called postmodern architecture. As Andreas Huyssen claims, “Nowhere does the break with modernism seem more obvious than in recent American architecture.”¹⁸⁴ So it is in America where one can see the biggest shift from modernism to postmodernism. After a period of interest, postmodern architecture was met with the same fate as modern architecture. Postmodern architecture, too, was found to be boring, thus leading the architectural world in search of something else. There was a certain amount of urgency to this, a dire need for change. What kind of change was called upon? Interestingly enough, a reversion back to modernism. If there is a lesson from this it seems to answer the question: How does one cure the boredom that ails? In the case of postmodern architecture it would seem as though it succumbed to the same fate as modernist architecture.

The mass-produced boredom of modernist architecture is not limited to buildings. One piece of furniture that seems to repeat itself in all modern urban spaces is the bus shelter. In his book *Reading the Everyday*, Joe Moran argues that “[i]t would be difficult to find a piece of modern architecture that inspires less interest than the bus shelter. It is

¹⁸³ Best and Kellner. *The Postmodern Turn*, 161.

¹⁸⁴ Andreas Huyssen, “Mapping the Postmodern,” *New German Critique* 33(Autumn, 1984): 12.

an omnipresent object of everyday life that, when it registers in the public consciousness, is usually only associated with graffiti and vandalism.”¹⁸⁵ With all of the spray paint, permanent marker, discarded refuse, and broken glass, among other things, it could also be argued that nothing inspires *more* than a bus shelter. In a way, they are miniature billboards that frequently have advertisements large enough to be seen from vehicles passing by. The advertisements that are plastered on the back of a bench could be read as discouraging users from sitting in front of them. This bench is brought to you by company x... But please don’t sit on it, you’ll block the advertisement. The upper lips of the models and/or actors (is there a difference?) in these advertisements seem to dare, if not invite, bus passengers to demonstrate their best mustache illustration skills. Although the inspiration may only entail defacing this particular urban space, it is still inspired. Regardless of whether one sees it as inspiring or not, Moran’s point is well taken. Bus shelters are symbols of waiting par excellence. Of course, they do not just symbolize waiting, they are also functional, or they are at least meant to be. They can shield one from the weather, as long as there are not too many people also waiting. Perhaps the application(s) of graffiti throughout the rest of the city (any city) reflect a similar frustration. Lefebvre would argue that it is a frustration rooted in everyday urban life.

New Towns: Chemically Pure Everyday Life

It is now appropriate to return to a theme from the previous chapter: the absence of style in everyday life. To delve further into Lefebvre’s idea it is perhaps best to look at Lefebvre’s most detailed discussion of new towns in English translation, which can be found in the seventh prelude of his book *Introduction to Modernity* titled ‘Notes on the

¹⁸⁵ Joe Moran, *Reading the Everyday* (London: Routledge, 2005), 5.

New Town’.¹⁸⁶ But first, what exactly are new towns?¹⁸⁷ Put simply, new towns are purely planned urban spaces, specifically constructed in order to create unique styles of life.¹⁸⁸ According to one commentator, the basic blueprint for new towns was laid in Ebenezer Howard’s book from 1898 called *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*.¹⁸⁹ The practice of constructing new towns transcended political and geographical boundaries, as they were constructed by the Eastern European socialist countries, Western liberal democracies, and even in the Third World. Occupying a widespread, global presence, they literally “are being built as a matter of public policy around the world.”¹⁹⁰ For Lefebvre, new towns serve as prime examples of everyday life in a “chemically pure state.”¹⁹¹ It is somewhat ironic that Lefebvre chose a new town as an archetypal space of boredom since new towns are often constructed precisely to combat boredom. For example, the new town of Evry in the Southwest of France is useful to highlight this point. One commentator notes: “It must be emphasized that Evry New Town was conceived as a city, not as a suburb. The point was to appeal to those of the French who wished “to rediscover urban life and to escape from the boredom of suburb

¹⁸⁶ Lefebvre makes a number of the same claims in a different but related text that has yet to be translated into English. See “Les Nouveaux Ensembles Urbains,” In *Du Rural à l’urbain*, ed. Mario Baviri, (Paris: Anthropos, 1970), 109-128.

¹⁸⁷ Jean Baudrillard provides an interesting take on defining new towns in relation to other urban spaces. He writes in the second volume of his *Cool Memories* diaries: “Old towns and cities have a history; American ones, being veritable urban bombs with no consideration for planning, have an uncontrolled sprawl. New towns have neither.” *Cool Memories II*, 5.

¹⁸⁸ *IM.*, 276.

¹⁸⁹ James M. Rubenstein, *The French New Towns* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 4. For the original source, see Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, ed. F.J. Osborn (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1. While I predominantly discuss the new town of Mureaux, France, these spaces are scattered throughout the globe, as is the boredom they instill. One concrete example comes from a story in the *New York Times* from 1971 about the boredom of West German new towns. The gist of the story is evident with the story’s title. See Lawrence Fellows, “Psychologists’ Report Finds New Towns in West Germany Boring to Children,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1971: 14.

¹⁹¹ *CEL* 2, 78.

dormitories.”¹⁹² Interestingly enough, ‘Evry’ new town is one vowel away from being ‘Every’ new town. Nevertheless, the basic idea behind new towns is the construction of a self-sufficient, rationally organized space. All of the necessities and luxuries of the large city are grafted on to spaces much smaller in size in order to reduce disparities in wealth, revitalize depressed regions, foster growth of industry and create jobs, etc.¹⁹³

If there is one word that best encapsulates the general sentiment, aura, feeling of a new town, it is ‘functionalism’.¹⁹⁴ This is by no means restricted to France. Lefebvre recalls a visit to a planning school in the United States where functionalism was the major intellectual foundation for its faculty and students:

I gave a seminar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on urban questions and discussed these questions with students. They said to me; do you want to see a project for a town? They took me to an enormous model and said: General Motors provides you with a ‘key in your hand’ in a town of 100 000 inhabitants. Then I looked at the model; it was built in an outrageously functionalist style, quite extreme, and everything was planned in advance. The different functions were juxtaposed and dispersed; it was quite astonishing. Then I said to them: are you not going to be bored stiff?¹⁹⁵

Functionalism to Lefebvre is the key dimension for this boredom. The proposed design for this new town was reminiscent of the new town of Mourenx that he wrote about several years before and seems to reflect Guy Debord’s suggested motto for new towns: “On this spot nothing will ever happen – and *nothing ever has*.”¹⁹⁶

In Lefebvre’s text, ‘Notes on the New Town’, Lefebvre juxtaposes the boredom found in two geographically close yet socially, historically and structurally distant towns in Southwestern France. One is an old town with roots going back to the Middle Ages,

¹⁹² Kenneth Kolson, *Big Plans: The Allure and Folly of Urban Design* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 128.

¹⁹³ Rubenstein, *The French New Towns*, 5.

¹⁹⁴ For an example of Lefebvre’s use of the concept of ‘functionalism’, see CEL 2, 198-206.

¹⁹⁵ INT, 32.

¹⁹⁶ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 126.

whereas the other is a new town with roots going back to a modern urban planner's imagination, albeit one tempered by government officials and corporate interests. The old town is Naverrenx, which is not only where Lefebvre resided at the time of his writing, but also where he grew up as a child. Lefebvre describes Navarrenx as a dying medieval town, which, by the way, has no relation to Bertrand Russell's medieval town mentioned in the first chapter, as it is one that has been gradually feeling the effects of modernity. Slowly changing its spatial makeup, the town struggles with and against modernization all the while glancing back at the traditional ways of life that are melting away into thin air. In contrast, the second town, Mourenx, is completely fabricated within the context of modernity without the traditions and organic maturation of old towns. The problem of Russell's synchronic analysis could not arise with a consideration of a new town, as Mourenx's boredom is one that can be said to represent modernity itself. When Lefebvre wrote his essay, he argued that Mourenx was looking like a failure in its quest to create a new style of life. However, to Lefebvre, it was "pregnant with desires, frustrated frenzies, unrealized possibilities. A magnificent life is waiting just around the corner and far, far away. It is waiting like a cake is waiting when there's butter, milk, flour and sugar."¹⁹⁷ This is a fundamental point in Lefebvre's conception of boredom. Boredom is a window into society and presents an opportunity for change. Here, Lefebvre's position is similar to Benjamin's, which Joe Moran nicely summarizes: "For Benjamin, the value of boredom is that it can form the beginnings of an awareness that the dull monotony of the present will only end with a resolution of the deeper contradictions of society, and the creation of an alternative society based on true

¹⁹⁷ IM, 124.

creativity and pleasure.”¹⁹⁸ Both Benjamin and Lefebvre see great potential to break out of the boredom inflicted by such urban spaces. The ingredients are all there, one simply has to mix them together to create the desired experience, which is perhaps easier said than done.

Lefebvre wonders if with Mourenx one is “entering the city of joy or the world of unredeemable boredom?”¹⁹⁹ The plan is for the former, but Lefebvre suspects the inevitability of the latter. Naverrenx, too, has its boredom, but it is distinct from that of Mourenx. Lefebvre articulates the difference as being the equivalent to sampling different varieties of wines at a wine-tasting event.²⁰⁰ Lefebvre mentions the boredom of Naverrenx as having the aroma of things gone by, as long winter nights and summer Sundays. This would appear to echo Russell’s imaginary medieval town, or even Heidegger’s example of walking in a big city on a Sunday, but Lefebvre approaches this boredom from an historical perspective, one that is aware of the effects of modernity. Unlike Heidegger, Lefebvre’s portrayal of the boredom of Navarrenx on a Sunday is not an example of profound boredom but is much closer to Barthes’ view of idleness mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. As well, unlike Russell who looks back in time without realizing that he is looking with eyes fashioned by modernity, Lefebvre acknowledges the same form of underwhelming boredom, but places it in its proper historical context. Therefore, the boredom of the medieval town may be boring to those who look back on it, but it was not boring for those who lived there.

Though it is “relatively easy on the eye,” the new town of Mourenx is a specific form of modernity that oozes sterility, precision, and dullness and where functionalism

¹⁹⁸ Joe Moran, “Benjamin and Boredom,” 180.

¹⁹⁹ IM, 119.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 124.

ultimately reigns supreme.²⁰¹ Referring to it as a “novel of objects,” Lefebvre reads Mourenx as a text, which he claims “modernity opens its pages” to him.²⁰² One of Lefebvre’s key insights in his reading of the ‘book of Mourenx’ involves the rationality at work throughout this new town. Though having few actual traffic lights, Mourenx is viewed by Lefebvre as reflecting the permissive and prohibitive ‘do’ and ‘don’t’ logic of the traffic light.²⁰³ Essentially, to Lefebvre, the entire town is one giant traffic light. To him, there is no need for very many traffic lights because the town itself is a seemingly endless series of greens and reds. If this logic is followed, one’s ability to be spontaneous is severely diminished. Although, to Lefebvre, the lack of spontaneity imposed by the new town both restricts experience as well as offers the opportunity to break out and become a work of art in Lefebvre’s utopian sense of the phrase. Functionalism can never fully dominate such a space; there is always a space for change. For this, one would have to discard the schedule imposed on one’s everyday life. Lefebvre explains:

Sociologically, the truth is that new towns reduce the everyday to its simplest terms while at the same time ‘structuring’ it heavily: the everyday in them is perfect and stripped bare in its privation, basic and deprived of basic spontaneity. It wanders around stagnantly and loses hope in the midst of its own emptiness, which nothing technical can ever fill, not even a television set or a car. Everyday life has lost a dimension: depth. Only triviality remains. Apartment buildings are often well-constructed ‘machines for living in’, and the housing estate is a machine for the upkeep of life outside work.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Ibid., 118.

²⁰² Ibid., 119. As early as the first volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre considered space(s) a(s) text(s). There, he writes: “Our towns may be read like a book (the comparison is not completely exact: a book signifies, whereas towns and rural areas ‘are’ what they signify). Towns show us the history of power and of human possibilities which, while becoming increasingly broad, have at the same time been increasingly taken over and controlled, until that point of total control, set up entirely above life and community, which is bourgeois control.” CEL 1, 233. Despite Lefebvre’s recurring usage of a text as a metaphor for space, and his unambiguous depiction of it as something that ‘may be read like a book’, this point is not widely acknowledged. For example, Scott Lash argues against Lefebvre when he writes that “[t]he city is for Lefebvre not something to be ‘read’.” *Critique of Information* (London: Sage, 2002), 119.

²⁰³ IM, 119.

²⁰⁴ CEL 2, 78-79.

With this passage we can see Lefebvre's thinly veiled critique of Le Corbusier, as well as those city planners that are in the same mould, with his reference to apartment buildings as 'machines for living in'. Here, the use of the term 'machines for living' is reminiscent of what Wallace Stevens referred to in his poem 'Ordinary Evening in New Haven' as "the celestial ennui of apartments."²⁰⁵

Lefebvre saw Le Corbusier's spectral fingerprints all over Mourenx and though it is relatively easy on the eye for him, he was admittedly terrified whenever he fixed his gaze on the ominous 'machines for living' that are strewn throughout.²⁰⁶ This new town had little of value for Lefebvre in transforming everyday life. Instead, Mourenx would further galvanize the functionalism and efficiency of modernity and consequently severely limit creative potentialities. As mentioned above, though Mourenx could never completely destroy spontaneity, it would come very close to it. This subordination of leisure to work is what Lefebvre finds so boring about the new town and this makes him wonder whether "the new towns which are born of ugliness and boredom [can] become works of art."²⁰⁷ Here we again see Lefebvre's use of the phrase 'work of art'. Above it was mentioned that Lefebvre believed towns to have been collective works of art. If anything, Lefebvre was at least hopeful that the boredom would subside in Mourenx. Of course, Lefebvre soon dispatched his hopefulness and eventually arrived at the realization that new towns were unredeemable errors in urban planning. Writing around the same time as his essay on Mourenx and Naverrenx, Lefebvre, in the second volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, claimed:

²⁰⁵ Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 381.

²⁰⁶ *IM*, 118.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

Every town planning scheme conceals a programme for everyday life. Explicitly or not, it refers to an overall conception of man, of life and of the world. In our new towns, the project or programme is all too apparent. Everyday life sees itself treated like packaging: a vast machine seizes the worker's time outside work and folds it in a wrapping as sterile as the protective cellophane round a commodity. People are separated from group to group (workers, craftsmen, technicians) and from each other, each in his box for living in, and this modernity organizes their repeated gestures. The same machinery whittles down the number of essential gestures. That most of these housing estates depend upon technically outstanding firms – automated – where work is almost entirely reduced to the control and upkeep of equipment makes the emptiness all the more blatant. Of course equipment does not function by itself; technical objects make up an ensemble which requires occasional attention. However, this can only come when the technical object issues a message, a *signal*. The town and the factory complement one another by both conforming to the technical object. An identical process makes work easy and passive, and life outside work fairly comfortable and boring. Thus everyday life at work and outside work become indistinguishable, governed as they are by systems of *signals*.²⁰⁸

Signals, directing and regulating one's everyday life, are scattered throughout a town both outside buildings, as well as inside them. They are equally at home in the street or the factory, or even the home.

The signal is a key facet to the 'double process' of industrialization and urbanization. The signal is a common link between these two processes. According to Lefebvre, "the signal was born with industrialization."²⁰⁹ The traffic light mentioned above is one such signal. Lefebvre elaborates the emergence and growth of signals when he writes:

At first they were limited to factories and railways, but soon they invaded everyday life in the form of traffic signals, and innumerable signals to permit or to prohibit. In 'industrial society', urban life becomes peopled by innumerable signalings. Each one programmes a routine, exactly like a calculator, regulating patterns of conduct and behaviour.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ CEL 2, 79.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 300.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Both the factory and the railway are mentioned here as archetypal spaces that exemplify the general logic of the industrial signal. In addition, Lefebvre likens the signal to a calculator, which is consistent with the calculative thinking emphasized by Simmel and Heidegger, mentioned in the second section of this chapter. Lefebvre notes how something like calculative thinking, to use Heidegger's term, not only occurs within people, but is also imposed upon them. One's freedom to partake in meditative thinking can be sidetracked by the rationality imposed on one's everyday life, especially in the structurally rigid design of a new town. There are few, if any, spaces available for meditative thinking, as one is overtly or implicitly being instructed by signals on what to do or not to do. Although this is present in the metropolis, this is especially the case for those who live in new towns. Lefebvre argues that

[f]or the inhabitant of a large building in a new town things will be very different, for his time-table is fixed, formulated, functionalized, inscribed on the walls, in what is left of roads, in shopping centres, parking spaces, bus stops and stations. The suburban householder talks in monologues, the new-town dweller talks in dialogues, with the authorities and with the absent but ever-present state; he speaks the language of wisdom, an organized wisdom claiming ever more organization. The rational neurosis of the suburban householder is echoed by the neurotic rationality of the other for whom make-believe is the rationality of commitments that fix his time-table and consume his life; the quotidianness of 'privacy' snuggling in the heart of everyday life is identified with a brief period of recuperation between days, weeks, months of commitments, after exhaustion. For each one the meaning of life is life without meaning; self-realization is a life without a history, total quotidianness, but unseen and evaded as soon as possible.²¹¹

To conclude this chapter it is worth noting that here Lefebvre makes a distinction between new towns and the suburbs in several respects. It is important for the present discussion to look at the 'neurotic rationality' of the suburbs in order to probe further into the 'double process' of industrialization and urbanization and its implications for the

²¹¹ ELMW, 122.

relationship between boredom, modernity, and everyday life. It is now time to switch from the dialogues of new town dwellers to the monologues of suburbia.

Chapter 4: The Endless Yawn of the Suburbs

Suburbia is the geography of late capitalism
as it extends itself into the farthest reaches
and most minute details of everyday life.¹ – Amy Maria Kenyon

Small wonder new suburbs all look the same.² – Mark Gottdiener

Suburbs are uniformly boring.³ – Mike Rock

* * * * *

The last of the above epigraphs emerged from an interview with the City Manager of Lakewood, Colorado (a suburb of Denver) as a response to the question: ‘What do you think of the suburbs?’ At the time of the interview, Lakewood was attempting to break the mould of suburban boredom by revitalizing its largest shopping centre. The general sentiment in the interview is that while ‘suburbs are uniformly boring’, the appropriate production of spaces of consumption is not only *a* suitable remedy, but *the* suitable remedy. While the ties between boredom and consumption will be explored in much more depth in the next chapter, this epigraph raises an important question: If the boredom or boringness of the suburbs does not hinge solely on the newness of a local shopping centre, then why are suburbs uniformly boring? Of course, it should be mentioned, not everyone would agree the suburbs are boring, especially not ‘uniformly boring’. To some, these peripheral habitats are ideal spaces for living, raising a family, pursuing a career, and much more.

Based on the suburb literature, there appears to be a gap between the experience of the people who live in suburbs and the scholars that study them. The City Manager’s

¹ Amy Maria Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia: Detroit and the Production of Postwar Space and Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 173.

² Mark Gottdiener, “A Marx for Our Time: Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space,” *Sociological Theory* 11(1), (March, 1993), 132.

³ Quoted in Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson, *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 161.

assessment seems to be the exact opposite of many scholars writing on the subject. For example, on the back cover of *The Suburb Reader*, Andréas Duany, one of the co-authors of the book *Suburban Nation* – one of the major commentaries on the state of suburbia in America – offers his praise of the contents inside while marginalizing the connection between the suburbs and boredom. He writes: “What a treasure trove of complexity and contradiction! After this collection no one can again say that the suburbs are boring!”⁴ It is somewhat ironic that Duany would acknowledge contradictions in the ‘reader’ while offering his own contradictory remark on the boredom of suburbs. To Duany’s exclamatory remarks regarding the inability to claim the suburbs as boring, I would reply both positively and negatively for the purposes of this chapter. Is Duany on to something here? Yes, Duany is correct in the sense that suburbs are highly interesting to study and no, in the sense that these interesting studies show that they can indeed be boring to live in. One of my chief sources for this claim is Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique*, which is not only a ‘treasure trove’ of analysis on suburban boredom, but it is also one of the texts featured in *The Suburb Reader* that Duany relied upon to make his point. This particular contradiction reveals a deeper, heavily entrenched general contradiction at the heart of suburban everyday life that I will explore in this chapter: the hidden yet omnipresent boredom of the suburbs.

The hypothesis that suburbs are boring will guide this chapter,⁵ the title of which is derived from the surrealist Luis Buñuel’s brief reflections on the suburbs.⁶ Buñuel’s

⁴ Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, eds., *The Suburb Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁵ I purposely exclude the word ‘uniformly’ that precedes ‘boring’ in Mike Rock’s assessment. It would be impossible to argue that every single thing, space, and temporal experience in the suburbs is boring, so I have limited my critique to key elements as opposed to the entirety of the suburbs.

⁶ The passage is as follows: “The endless yawn of the suburb, its fringed and withered eyes, are always the huge maleficence of the city. Even when day dances gaily through the nearby rooftops, it is immediately seized by the snare of the endless sadness of the suburb, which is the black brushstroke upon the riotous

poetic phrase ‘the endless yawn of the suburb’ is an apt metaphor for the central hypothesis. While Buñuel’s words (penned in 1923) pre-date the golden age of suburbia that began after the Second World War, he is nevertheless correct in his assessment, if not utterly prophetic. It is as though he had dreamt the future. Then again, if the suburbs seem to yawn endlessly, it would be safe to assume that they would continue to grow, morph, and sprawl long into the future. An aerial view of these sprawling urban offshoots often reveals row after row of cookie-cutter homes, gas guzzling SUVs,⁷ and vast chains of big box stores, which is an image that is consistent with Buñuel’s artistic genre of surrealism. “Because sprawl is so unsatisfying,” writes Duany and his co-authors, “it remains tempting to think of it as an accident.”⁸ This “seemingly irreversible American project”⁹ of highly rationalized, planned similitude is by no means accidental. If thought of in Buñuel’s surrealist terms, it is a dream for some, but a nightmare for others. The boredom experienced in these vast areas of sameness can perhaps be claimed as accidental, but this ‘American project’ as a whole cannot.

Building on the above hypothesis, the central question of this chapter is: Following Goodstein, if boredom is first of all an urban phenomenon, how are the suburbs linked to the experience of boredom? To answer this question I have divided this chapter into four sections. The first section will delve into the general characteristics of suburban development. The point of departure is Lefebvre’s work, specifically his

gaiety of the town. These lethargic quarters belong to the land of the incurable, the doomed. Their emotion is the emotion of dried trees. The inhabitants have become victims of the rabid bite which the soul of the suburb produces. This suburbophobia has no cure other than the premature injection of some sacks of gold.” Luis Buñuel, “Suburbs,” in Francisco Aranda, *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography*, trans. and ed. David Robinson (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), 254.

⁷ In fact, one of the larger Sport Utility Vehicles (SUV) currently manufactured by Chevrolet is called the ‘Suburban’.

⁸ Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck. *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000), 12.

⁹ Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia*, 19.

concept of ‘urban fabric’ which helps to further connect his project of a critique of everyday life with his urban and spatial writings. The second section will argue that Marc Augé’s notion of ‘non-places’ is an important concept for understanding not only Lefebvre’s approach to the suburbs, but also the boredom associated with some of its archetypal spaces such as the highway and the shopping mall. The third section will attend to a critical discussion of an often overlooked, if not maligned suburban figure, the suburban housewife. While luminary feminist figures such as Betty Friedan have paved the way by elevating the status of housewives as a serious topic of research, the key experience of boredom is either detached from this work (as was noted above with Duany) or boredom is given short shrift in the overall academic schematic. Essentially, if housewives are given attention at all and deemed to be a serious area of research, their boredom generally is not and vice versa. This section will argue against the position – best represented in the boredom literature by Reinhard Kuhn’s text – that the boredom of the suburbanite is the most superficial of all boredoms by arguing for the opposite, which is the immense importance of a housewife’s profound boredom. The final section will highlight an important technological aspect of suburban living, the television, and its dual/duel (dialectical) role of eliminating boredom while concurrently creating the conditions for it. The growth of the suburbs in concert with the availability of televisions in the home will be explored as mutually reinforcing spaces and objects. The oscillation between boredom and distraction with television viewing will also serve as a point of departure for a more general discussion of technology and everyday life that will apply not only to suburbia, but to society more generally.

Sprawl: The Urban Fabric

In the expansive foreword to the first volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre notes the suburban development surrounding Paris. These brief remarks, lasting no more than two pages were written in 1958 and sprang forth after Lefebvre glanced up from writing the foreword. He ultimately predicts that these suburbs will be “swamped” by “mediocrity.”¹⁰ However, before condemning these suburbs to perpetual mediocrity, Lefebvre acknowledges how grateful many working class and/or poor individuals would be in order to live in such a place. Those beneath the archetypal everyday life of the middle-class would relish such an opportunity, whereas those that live above this archetypal quotidian mode of life would surely live in a much more exclusive and costly space. Lefebvre, then, is not speaking on behalf of all people when he speaks of the mediocrity of the suburbs, he is speaking of the socio-economic group that predominantly calls these areas home. It is the middle-class that will be forced to tarry with what Lefebvre calls the mediocrity of the suburbs, if they choose to live in such a space.

As for the particular case of America, in his book on the ‘rise and fall of suburbia’, titled *Bourgeois Utopias*, Robert Fishman argues that “if the nineteenth century could be called the Age of Great Cities, post-1945 America would appear to be the Age of Great Suburbs.”¹¹ ‘Great’ in the latter case appears to be a quantitative

¹⁰ CEL 1, 43. He qualifies this thought elsewhere, arguing that certain outsiders may dislike the suburban lifestyle, but there are many who happily call the suburbs home. He writes: “In ‘naturalness’ we find, recreating themselves in an odd sort of waking dream, ‘lived’ happiness and the consciousness that lives it, the illusion and the real. This waking dream is the discourse of the owner of the *pavillon*, his everyday discourse, poor as others see it, but rich for him.” KW, 133. In keeping with the passage from Luis Buñuel mentioned above, the suburban lifestyle can indeed be seen, following Lefebvre, as a ‘waking dream’ for many.

¹¹ Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 182.

valuation as opposed to an assessment of quality. Indeed, over the span of three decades (1950-1980), the suburbs saw their collective population jump from 35.2 million residents to 101.5 million, and in 1990 roughly half of all Americans called the suburbs home.¹² This general process of post-war spatial production was not, however, restricted to America. While America is the purest example, Lefebvre sees this shift in the configuration of space as a global phenomenon.

It is on the worldwide scale that the space born in the second half of the twentieth century is reproduced: airports, highways, vertical cities of concrete, horizontal cities of detached houses [*pavillons*]. The sameness need not be underlined, and only the details differ among the ugly buildings, functional edifices, and even monuments. We enter into a world of combinations whose every element is known and recognized. The resemblances border on (abstract, self-evident) identity and visible equivalence. Systems of equivalence take on a sensible existence and are inscribed in space. Futile effects of difference, understood scornfully as aesthetic (variations in color and form), do not interrupt the monotony. This repetitive consumption of things in space and of space filled with things gives rise to an indelible boredom.¹³

Indeed, the boredom accompanying the production of space is widespread. I argue that the above passage from Lefebvre is a key for linking the suburbs with boredom and I shall utilize it as the point of departure for connecting the two. As well, a Lefebvrian triad will inform my analysis of the critical literature on the suburbs: homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchization.¹⁴

It should be mentioned that suburbs are not new; they were not invented in the twentieth century. Their mass-production, however, is specific to this time period.

While suburbs have been around for some time, the focus of this chapter is on this mass-produced post-war development that took place in the middle of the twentieth century

¹² Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia*, 19.

¹³ SSW, 212-213.

¹⁴ These three interrelated characteristics are specific to the space produced by modernity. KW, 210. This triad can be found in both Lefebvre's spatial writings as well his everyday life writings. For the former, see "Space and Mode of Production," SSW, 212-216. For the latter, see CEL 3, 83-88.

most forcefully and pervasively in America. This process can be referred to as suburbanization. The process of suburbanization is not restricted to the United States, but gradually became one that is worldwide in scope. Such a claim follows Lefebvre who along with the extended passage above has noted that “there was a space produced from the 1960s on; it was at a world scale, based on aeroplanes, motorways, suburbs, peripheries, the disintegration of historic centres and conurbations.”¹⁵ Following Lefebvre, suburbanization is not only a construction of specific dwelling spaces on the outskirts of city limits, but is, much more generally, a process of decentralization. A centre eroding into peripheries is a useful and much more accurate way of viewing this process than the simple characterization of one (or one’s family) realizing the American Dream¹⁶ through the acquisition of the stereotypical green lawns, white picket fences, and nosey neighbours.¹⁷ Of course, these latter items are certainly part and parcel of suburbanization to varying degrees, but the general concern for this chapter is the one, or centre, becoming others, or peripheries. At the same time, this is not to say that the center vanishes with the extension of peripheries. Rather, Lefebvre’s point should be

¹⁵ INT, 31.

¹⁶ As for the mythical ‘American Dream’, I agree with Genrich Krasko who essentially identifies it as one where people relentlessly pursue “affluence and wealth” in the United States of America. *The Unbearable Boredom of Being: a Crisis of Meaning in America*, 37. However, this is the only point I borrow from Krasko who argues that education is the root of the problem and “the future of your children, grand- and great-grandchildren is at stake at this crucial turning point in this country’s [America’s] destiny,” xxiv. For Lawrence Grossberg, the socio-cultural shifts in America after World War II resulted in the perception that “the American Dream turned out to be boring.” Lawrence Grossberg, “Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life,” *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 229. Grossberg’s point can be contrasted with James A. Roberts’s, who believes boredom arises when the American Dream is no longer sought: “We are a nation adrift, having lost sight of the true American Dream. We are a people afflicted with the diseases of boredom and meaninglessness.” James A. Roberts, *Shiny Objects: Why We Spend Money We Don’t Have in Search of Happiness We Can’t Buy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 301.

¹⁷ This is not to say that the centre is not holding. Rather, the centre has dramatically shifted throughout the middle of the twentieth century. So, while it makes sense to speak of a city as a specific physical space, it does not make sense to limit the urban fabric to a certain self-contained area.

emphasized, which he was adamant about, that “urban cores do not disappear” they persist, albeit in a mutated form.¹⁸

To further situate the problematic of suburbia within the theoretical framework offered by Lefebvre some clarification is in order. The applicability of this framework is by no means commonplace or obvious. To simplify the debates in the secondary literature, two broad currents of Lefebvre scholars can be articulated. On the one hand, there are those who believe Lefebvre’s project of a critique of everyday life is suitable to the suburbs much more than the urban, and on the other hand, there are those who argue for the obverse.¹⁹ For example, Kristin Ross argues that Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life is much more suited to suburban life than urban. She writes: “The contemporary ‘urban’, for Lefebvre then, is closer to what others have called the suburban or ‘periurban.’”²⁰ This perspective can be contrasted with Susan Willis who begins her book *A Primer for Daily Life* with an author’s note acknowledging the importance of Lefebvre’s pioneering texts, but distinguishes her work from his by characterizing his as being in a primarily European urban context, whereas she opts for an American suburban context.²¹ Ross and Willis are both correct in their assessments of Lefebvre’s project as well as both incorrect in the sense that they both write of partial truths. If one fuses certain elements of both perspectives together, discard the remainders, the approach I take in this chapter will begin to take shape. Essentially, Lefebvre’s critique of everyday

¹⁸ WC, 73.

¹⁹ Amy Maria Kenyon’s book *Dreaming Suburbia* is an exception to these undialectical portrayals of Lefebvre’s project. Kenyon makes considerable use of Lefebvre’s work to discuss the dialectical relationship between the urban area of Detroit and its surrounding suburbs.

²⁰ Ross, “Streetwise,” 75.

²¹ Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daily Life* (London: Routledge, 1991). There is no page number for this note, though it is before page 1. It should be mentioned that along with Lefebvre, Willis also attributes the importance of the European notion of everyday life in an urban context to Michel de Certeau.

life, understood as a general orientation for a large part of his oeuvre, is concerned with both the urban and suburban, both American and European contexts.

While the previous chapter primarily focuses on the urban European context and this chapter focuses on the suburban American context, it is important to note that the boredom of the suburbs is not unique to America. For example, Lefebvre's former student Manuel Castells has argued that boring suburbs are widespread throughout Europe. Castells claims that "the new professional middle class in Europe is torn between attraction to the peaceful comfort of boring suburbs and the excitement of a hectic, and often too expensive, urban life."²² With this, it is apparent that Castells departs from Lefebvre's position by offering a fairly one-dimensional portrayal of the city as exciting and fast-paced. As was the purpose of the previous chapter, the urban may be filled with excitement but it is also filled with boredom, and it is important to stress that the two terms share a dialectical relationship, one at the heart of everyday modern life. With Castells formulation, it would seem as though the black sun of boredom shines brightest outside the city limits. As if the skyscrapers of the metropolis provide the necessary shade of excitement from the harmful rays of boredom. But exiting the city limits is not so easy. It is not as if one throws off the cloak of boredom by entering or leaving a certain physical space, which is consistent with Lefebvre's work, and is why Lefebvre is a key figure for linking boredom with space more generally.

Lefebvre's concept of 'urban fabric' is important here. It not only exemplifies the 'double process' of industrialization and urbanization, this term also disrupts the normal

²² Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 433. Castells was an assistant to Lefebvre at the University of Paris – Nanterre.

conceptions of the urban as a synonym for city.²³ It is a dialectical concept that allows one to theorize the countryside as part of the urban despite the seemingly antithetical nature of the two. One of the most succinct definitions of this term can be found near the beginning of Lefebvre's book *The Urban Revolution*:

The *urban fabric* grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life. This expression, "urban fabric," does not narrowly define the built world of cities but all manifestations of the dominance of the city over the country. In this sense, a vacation home, a highway, a supermarket in the countryside are all part of the urban fabric. Of varying density, thickness, and activity, the only regions untouched by it are those that are stagnant or dying, those that are given over to "nature."²⁴

Following Lefebvre, I claim the suburbs are at the same time both urban and not urban.

To put it in Lefebvrian terminology, they are part of the urban continuity and discontinuity. Lefebvre summarizes his perspective thusly: "If one defines urban reality by dependency *vis-à-vis* the centre, suburbs are urban. If one defines urban order by a perceptible (legible) relationship between centrality and periphery, suburbs are de-urbanized."²⁵ On the one hand, it could be argued that the suburbs have the best of the city and the country. On the other hand, it could be argued that the suburbs have neither the best of the city or the country, but actually synthesizes the worst elements of the two. It all depends on one's perspective, as well as one's suburb.

A de-urbanized, yet dependent periphery is established around the city. Effectively, these new suburban dwellers are still urban even though they are unaware of it and believe themselves to be close to nature, to the sun and to greenery. One could call it a de-urbanizing and de-urbanized urbanization to emphasize the paradox.²⁶

²³ As Lefebvre once put it in a debate, "I don't use the words 'city' or 'urban' in their restrictive meanings." In Leszek Kolakowski and Henri Lefebvre. *Reflexive Water*, 247.

²⁴ UR, 3-4.

²⁵ WC, 79. This is characterized by Lefebvre as a "double movement" of "explosion-implosion, condensation-dispersion." Ibid., 123.

²⁶ Ibid., 77-78.

As Lefebvre notes, downtown metropolitan cores altered their makeup extensively in the middle of the twentieth century, and he most notably found that “city centres empty themselves for offices.”²⁷ The most obvious example of this is the rise in the population of the suburbs and the decline of urban populations. At the same time as the suburbs are expanding, expensive condominiums and skyscrapers are being erected throughout metropolises around the world. The city becomes much more vertical, while suburbia becomes much more horizontal. Or, it could be said, the urban fabric expands in a three-dimensional manner.

Alongside Lefebvre’s concept of the urban fabric, an apt label for the general process of suburbanization is ‘sprawl’. Sprawl is a phenomenon of the twentieth century and does not apply to the earlier suburbs from the nineteenth century. The suburbs that were constructed between 1850 and 1920 were strung along railway lines.²⁸ These suburbs were, according to Lewis Mumford, “discontinuous, and properly spaced.”²⁹ Walking was a common mode of transportation, which largely vanished with the expansion of highways and the proliferation of automobiles.³⁰ The “earlier type of suburb”³¹ with its definitive parameters inevitably gave way to a continuous sprawl of urban fabric. Mumford argues that when this happened suburbs could no longer be considered as neighbourhoods; they “became part of the inescapable metropolis.”³² Here,

²⁷ Ibid., 78.

²⁸ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, 1961), 503.

²⁹ Ibid., 504.

³⁰ Ibid., 505.

³¹ Ibid., 504.

³² Ibid., 505. Mumford’s use of the term ‘neighbourhoods’ is fairly consistent with the anthropological and geographical concept of ‘place’. This suggests a transition from ‘place’ to what has been referred to by Edward Relph as ‘placelessness’. For a distinction between these terms, see Relph’s *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976). For the present purposes, it is worthwhile to note that Relph argues in this work that: “roads, railways, airports, cutting across or imposed on the landscape rather than

there is an affinity between Mumford's position and Lefebvre's, which is especially evident in the following extended passage from Mumford's book *The City in History*:

The ultimate outcome of the suburb's alienation from the city became visible only in the twentieth century, with the extension of the democratic ideal through the instrumentalities of manifold and mass production. In the mass movement into suburban areas a new kind of community was produced, which caricatured both the historic city and the archetypal suburban refuge: a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold, manufactured in the central metropolis. Thus the ultimate effect of the suburban escape in our time is, ironically, a low-grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible. What has happened to the suburban exodus in the United States now threatens, through the same mechanical instrumentalities, to take place, at an equally accelerating rate, everywhere else – unless the most vigorous countermeasures are taken.³³

If one takes Mumford at his word, it is remarkable that the search for a better lifestyle in the suburbs was met with disappointment in virtually every aspect of living. It would seem as though if action is not taken soon, there will be no escape from the 'low-grade uniform environment' of the suburbs.

Is everything in the suburbs low-grade and uniform? That would be a rather difficult claim to make, if not empirically impossible to verify or falsify. Surely many of its inhabitants are happy with what the suburbs have to offer; many of its inhabitants are not profoundly bored or dissatisfied. But are boring suburbs a bad thing? Boredom in the Lefebvorean sense of the term is an indictment of society. However, in common, everyday terminology, referring to one's suburban lifestyle as boring can be a declaration of satisfaction and comfort. Boring here is predicated upon predictability. Many people

developing with it, are not only features of placelessness in their own right, but, by making possible the mass movement of people with all their fashions and habits, have encouraged the spread of placelessness well beyond their immediate impacts," 90.

³³ Mumford, *The City in History*, 486.

would be perfectly happy with a boring life. That is, a stable existence with little variation is an appealing prospect to many. Knowing that the mortgage will be paid, the car will start on the first try, the kids will have time after school to do their homework, and so on, are all largely predictable for many middle-class suburban families, and many other families would be happy to live this way.

Alternatively, Marxists can be particularly hostile to the suburban way of life. Lefebvre's former associates, the Situationists, mentioned in the previous chapter as harsh critics of contemporary city planning, are extremely hostile to the suburbs and would not accept the suburban lifestyle as an example of happiness in modernity. They claim that "boredom and total lack of social life characterize suburban housing developments."³⁴ This 'total lack of social life' echoes Lefebvre's claim (mentioned at the end of the previous chapter) that suburban dwellers speak in monologues. There is no reciprocal exchange of ideas. Although not encapsulating the entire problem, part of the unidirectional and seldom heard monologue stems from the isolation of the detached housing schemes. Lefebvre writes:

In France the beginnings of the suburb are also the beginnings of a violently anti-urban planning approach; a singular paradox. For decades during the Third Republic appeared documents authorizing and regulating owner-occupied suburbs and plots. What could be more accurately referred to here is the *banlieue pavillonnaire*, a type of suburbanization begun in this period in France characterized by small owner-occupied housing whose nearest Anglo-Saxon equivalent in terms of typology and social relations is the 'bungalow'.³⁵

This passage, though written with France in mind, equally applies to America. The dream of happiness is shared in both parts of the world. This is the expectation, according to Lefebvre, of those that live in the peripheries.

³⁴ Situationist International, "Geopolitics of Hibernation," In *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 105.

³⁵ WC, 77-78.

What do those who live in it expect from it? Nothing less than happiness. Many people experience it like that, forgetting the disadvantages, arguing them away. This happiness, in which fiction and reality are as thoroughly mixed as water and wine in a glass, ought to be attained via nature, a healthy and regular life and normality, all connected in this utopia with the *pavillon*.³⁶

Bungalows are certainly widespread in the suburbs of the United States, but they are the much more modest version of today's symbol of suburban housing: the McMansion. The authors of *Suburban Nation* put it as follows: "In the sparse universe of sprawl, the elementary particle is the single-family house. The current model is the fast-food version of the American dream – some call it the McMansion."³⁷ The McMansion is a hyper version of the standard one floor bungalow.³⁸ While significantly larger in size than its cousin, the McMansion follows the same logic of cookie-cutter design.

Orrin E. Klapp summarizes suburban development as the process of "making places seem alike."³⁹ In this view, one shared by Lefebvre, houses seemingly roll off assembly lines one after the other with the same house dimensions, same lot size, same number of windows, etc. Mark Gottdiener notes that this is a fairly widespread criticism of the suburbs. "[S]ince the advent of suburban development," writes Gottdiener, "untold numbers of critics have complained about the rather ordinary, banal, and boring landscape created by mile after mile of sprawling, tacky-tacky housing."⁴⁰ These tacky-tacky houses also place a demand on its owners that they follow certain tick-tock routines. Lefebvre argues that a "home-buyer buys a daily schedule."⁴¹ Regardless of

³⁶ KW, 132.

³⁷ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 41.

³⁸ It could even be said that it is the postmodern version of a suburban bungalow. Both can be considered as simulacra.

³⁹ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 78.

⁴⁰ Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: Dreams, Media Fantasies, and Lived Environments* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 37.

⁴¹ PS, 339. A few pages later in the same text, Lefebvre adds another dimension to this when he writes: "All the same, what is it that a buyer acquires when he purchases a space? The answer is time." Ibid., 356.

whether one works inside or outside the home, routines begin to take shape after the dotted line on the property deed is signed. The daily schedule of a suburban dweller is de facto different from those who call the city their home. This goes for both domestic workers and those who work external to the home. “[T]he city dweller today,” notes Lefebvre, “has a different relation to everyday life than that suffered unwillingly by the suburban householder or the new-town dweller, for in his case adaptation counterbalances compulsion.”⁴² One must adapt to an environment of homogeneity, while feeling the concurrent fragmentation of the social, and striving to keep up culturally with the Joneses and the hierarchization of status.

While experiencing a somewhat different daily life than city dwellers, suburban dwellers do share some commonalities. In general, the suburbs are characterized by this sprawling ticky-tacky housing (simulacra housing), whereas urban areas generally do not have the same type of homogeneity regarding domestic spaces. That is to say, the huge tracts of land predominantly devoted to homogenous housing are generally a suburban phenomenon as opposed to an urban one. However, the idea of ticky-tacky housing is not exclusive to the suburbs if one considers the urban equivalent: condominiums. Suburban ticky-tacky housing sprawls outwards, or horizontally, with bungalows and McMansions, but urban ticky-tacky housing sprawls upwards, or vertically, with the mass-produced condominiums that are populating downtown cores more and more these days. Lewis Mumford – believing these condominiums have their roots in Le Corbusier’s International Style – has called these high rise buildings a type of “vertical suburb.”⁴³ When viewed in this light, condominiums can be thought of as a

⁴² ELMW, 123.

⁴³ Mumford, *The City in History*, 519.

suburbanization of the urban. The urban fabric, then, not only flows outwards to the spaces on the periphery, but the periphery, too, flows into the centre in a dialectical relationship. The same can be said for the flow of traffic around a city centre depending on the time of day. During a weekday morning, for example, the traffic predominantly flows in a unilateral direction from the suburbs into the city centre, and the reverse occurs in the evening. It is important to note this dialectic between the urban and suburban, as it gives some colour to Lefebvre's concept of urban fabric.⁴⁴ Lefebvre discusses this in his first major book on urbanism from 1968 *Le Droit à la ville* (*The Right to the City*).

Lefebvre argues that

the extension of the city produced suburbs, then the suburb engulfed the urban core. The problems have been inversed, when they are not misunderstood. Would it not be more coherent, more rational and agreeable to work in the suburbs and live in the city rather than work in the city while living in a hardly habitable suburb?⁴⁵

Lefebvre's hypothetical scenario effectively inverts the standard living and work spaces for suburban dwellers. It is an interesting question to ponder. Such a question is indicative of one aspect of Lefebvre's dialectical approach, to invert what is for what could be. That is, the utopian demanding for the impossible becoming possible.

American suburbs, those new 'utopian' spaces of modernity, have been referred to by Robert Fishman, such as in the title of his book of the same name, as 'bourgeois utopias'. While the movement of people from the city to the suburbs in mid-nineteenth century Paris – as a result of Haussmann's revolutionary plan – was a forced mass exodus, the flight from the city to the suburbs for many one hundred years later in

⁴⁴ The missing third term for a proper Lefebvrian triad could be said to be 'rural'. While Lefebvre has written a substantial amount on the rural, it is not of concern here for the purposes of this dissertation. For more on this aspect of Lefebvre's work, see the following representative essay: "Perspectives on Rural Sociology," In KW, 111-120.

⁴⁵ WC, 128.

America was largely fuelled by the hope for a better style of life. As Lynn Spigel points out, “by purchasing their detached suburban homes, the young couples of the middle class participated in the construction of a new community of values; in magazines, in films, and on the airwaves they became the cultural representatives of the ‘good life’.”⁴⁶ This initiated a dialectical intertwining of the striving of the good life and the promotion of it, which Spigel outlines as follows:

Postwar America witnessed a significant shift in traditional notions of neighborhood. Mass-produced suburbs like Levittown, New York, and Park Forest, Illinois, replaced previous forms of public space with a newly defined aesthetic of prefabrication. At the center of suburban space was the young, upwardly mobile-middle class family; the suburban community was, in its spatial articulations, designed to correspond with and reproduced patterns of nuclear family life. Playgrounds, yards, schools, churches, and synagogues provided town centers for community involvement based on discrete stages of family development. Older people, gay and lesbian people, homeless people, unmarried people, and people of color were simply written out of these community spaces, and were relegated back to the cities.⁴⁷

The suburban community profile, however, has changed a considerable amount since the immediate years after World War II. The central criterion for suburban living today is credit. If one can borrow it, one can buy it, and one can live in it. This is not to say that ageism, sexism, racism, or homophobia do not exist in the peripheries; rather, present-day suburbs are much more inclusive than the suburbs of yesteryear.

Robert Fishman has argued that an example of the ‘classic suburb’ could be found at the end of the nineteenth century outside of Philadelphia in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania.⁴⁸ Conversely, it has also been argued that there is no such thing as a

⁴⁶ Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁸ See Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 134-154.

‘classic suburb’.⁴⁹ If there is a basic blueprint for the suburbs, however, I would argue that Levittown, U.S.A.⁵⁰ would certainly be close to it. Where exactly is Levittown? It is in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, as well as Puerto Rico. These are the official Levittowns, but their simulacra sprawl throughout the United States. Named after the family that spawned them, it is somewhat difficult to imagine that Levittowns sprang forth from somewhere at some point. Although the family company Levitt and Sons is mostly forgotten today, the cover of the July 13th, 1950 edition of *Time Magazine* features a large illustrated drawing of William J. Levitt’s head on the cover. Visible in the background behind Levitt’s looming visage is the row after row of uniform tract housing which appears in a similar fashion to a thought bubble. This cover image is suggesting that here is the brain behind, or in this case, in front of, Levittown. Having immense, albeit indirect, influence over aspiring developers, Levitt was the poster boy (magazine cover boy) for “industrial style planner-developer-builders.”⁵¹ While other suburbs may not share the name ‘Levittown’, Levitt’s blueprints are copied in one form

⁴⁹ Amy Maria Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia: Detroit and the Production of Postwar Space and Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 19.

⁵⁰ An album was released in 2008 called *Levittown* by the progressive-rock band Planet P Project. It is a concept album that explores the endless striving amongst residents of the suburbs to live the mythical American Dream. Though not referring to Levittown, the Canadian indie-rock band Arcade Fire released a concept album on the suburbs of its own in 2010 with the appropriate title *The Suburbs* (winner of the 2011 Grammy Award for Album of the Year). The latter album features songs that mesh well with the theme of boredom such as ‘Modern Man’, ‘City With No Children’, ‘Empty Room’, ‘Sprawl I (Flatland)’ and ‘Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)’. The song ‘Modern Man’ concerns a person waiting for something, but they are not sure what it is. The song’s story is reminiscent of a Benjamin passage mentioned in the first chapter that “we are bored when we don’t know what we are waiting for.” Since the first and the last track are both title tracks, if played on a continuous loop, the transition between the last track and the first track give a sense that once you are in the suburbs there is no escape. For an explicit reference to boredom, the opening track has the following lyrics: “By the time the first bombs fell we were already bored, we were already bored.”

⁵¹ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 193.

or another around the United States. According to Robert Venturi, the “infinite consistency of Levittown” belies its complexity, the fate of which “is boredom.”⁵²

The Levittowners

How is Levittown boring?⁵³ This is one of the questions the sociologist Herbert Gans set out to answer in his appropriately titled book *The Levittowners* which was published in 1967. He wanted to get to the heart of American suburban living, so Gans sought out what he believed to be the “prototype of postwar suburbia”⁵⁴ Gans conducted his research via participant observation in Levittown, New Jersey. Demonstrating immense dedication to his project, Gans purchased a four-bedroom ‘Cape Cod’ home there and was one of the first 25 families to move into the area.⁵⁵ In a way, Gans’ study is that of a gossipy neighbor with an academic twist. While trying to blend in to his surroundings, Gans acknowledges that he was a “researcher” and did not participate as “a normal resident.”⁵⁶ Gans notes that if he had revealed that he was a researcher, people would have not been as forthcoming with information, if not exclude him entirely. Instead of them shutting him out, he shut himself off. While Gans believes that he succeeded with his “Saturday morning bull session on the front lawn” with the men of Levittown, he acknowledges that “relaxed conversation with women was more difficult.”⁵⁷ For his study to succeed, Gans claims that he “had to be neutral, not offering opinions on controversial issues,”⁵⁸ which is ultimately why his study is problematic. His

⁵² Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 59.

⁵³ I have not specified a particular Levittown, as they are all produced with the same general schematics. There would, of course, be differences, but the experience of boredom, I argue, is not one of them.

⁵⁴ Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1967), xvii.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, xxv.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

participant observation is thus one of non-participation and, as a result, one of non-observation.

How exactly could one be a participant-observer for the boredom of others? This simply would not do if one's boredom was concealed from immediate view. What exactly would you look for in such a case? How can one fully participate in the boredom of another? In addition to his participant-observation, Gans conducted three different sets of interviews with two random samples and one from those who originally lived in Philadelphia. For boredom, he asked his interviewees the question: "We all get bored every so often. How often do you find yourself feeling bored, having nothing to do, or nothing you want to do especially? Do you feel this way: almost everyday, a few times a month, about once a month, or less often than that?"⁵⁹ His basic findings are summarized on the following passage:

Although people may underreport, 40 per cent (about a third of the women and more than half the men) are never bored and only a few women are constantly so. Boredom does not seem to be a serious problem in Levittown. Younger people experienced somewhat more boredom than older ones, but there was no pattern by class. Since former city dwellers reported as much boredom in their prior residence as suburban ones, the common idea that suburbanites are more bored than city dwellers is inaccurate.⁶⁰

With this, Gans essentially claims that the boredom of the suburbs, at least those called Levittown, is nothing more than a myth perpetuated by those who do not know what actually takes place there.

The question arises: Are interviews an appropriate method for understanding the relationship between boredom and the suburbs? Gans certainly thought so even though he acknowledges that underreporting boredom is a strong possibility. It would seem that

⁵⁹ Ibid., 228.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

this would occur in particular with those who do not wish to be associated with the experience of boredom. For example, Patricia Meyer Spacks has noted that regarding the image of the bored suburbanite, “women do not wish to be identified with this unattractive figure.”⁶¹ Margaret Atherton, writing in 1910, makes the salient point that while women may outwardly appear to be as happy as can be, they will – if they trust you – take you aside and “confide in you that they are bored to death.”⁶² I would argue that there is a strong possibility that the people of Levittown that Gans interviewed were not willing to confide in him. The stigma attached to boredom would surely prevent these people from being candid. Such a situation is best exemplified in the Sinclair Lewis novel *Babbitt* when the title character is having a conversation with his friend named Paul. Babbitt, though perplexed by the topic, listens intently while Paul offers his opinion on the complexities of boredom:

[I] don’t know the solution of boredom. If I did, I’d be the one philosopher that had the cure for living. But I do know that about ten times as many people find their lives dull, and unnecessarily dull, as ever admit it; and I do believe that if we busted out and admitted it sometimes, instead of being nice and patient and loyal for sixty years, and then nice and patient and dead for the rest of eternity, why, maybe, possibly, we might make life more fun.⁶³

Evidently, Paul is of the belief that many people do not admit to their experiences of boredom. There is a stigma attached to such an admission. However, to Paul, the answer to the riddle of boredom would be the key to an authentic and meaningful style of life. Along with the risk involved with exclaiming one’s boredom and the stigma attached to it, withholding one’s experience of boredom also entails a risk of not being afforded the opportunity to seek or find a solution to it.

⁶¹ Spacks, *Boredom*, 180.

⁶² Gertrude Atherton, “The Woman in Love: Part III,” *Harper’s Bazaar* 44(5), (May, 1910): 305.

⁶³ Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 54-55.

In addition to his methods of participant-observation and interviewing, Gans noted that he “used newspaper articles” to inform his study.⁶⁴ Despite this, there is one article in particular that seems to refute his assertion that Levittown is not boring. While the article itself is from Levittown, Pennsylvania, the article could have easily been about Gans’ very own Levittown, New Jersey. A story from 1963 in the January 23rd edition of a Philadelphia newspaper, *The Evening Bulletin*, was titled ‘Levittown Youth Blames Riot on Plain Boredom’. The basic message embedded in the article is that two groups of Levittown teenagers – the Conservatives and the Jives – engaged in a battle royal of boredom versus boredom. A local reverend was asked to comment on the riot and he replied that “instead of ‘Conservatives’ and ‘Jives’, we should call them ‘the Orphans’ and ‘the Neglected’.” One of the riot’s participants, an unnamed sixteen year old boy, informed a police officer that over the course of the ten years he has lived in Levittown he has become “just plain bored.” He is not alone with his boredom, as he goes on to state that “we all are [...] we just hang around the shopping center looking for any kind of action.”⁶⁵ These teenagers could be considered as both ‘victims of sprawl’ as well as ‘victims of boredom’.

In *Suburban Nation*, the authors offer several characterizations of ‘victims of sprawl’ with the caveat that “upon investigation, it is difficult to identify a segment of the population that does not suffer in some way from the lifestyle imposed by contemporary suburban development.”⁶⁶ While the third section in this chapter will focus on one of these ‘victims’ (suburban housewives), it is important to also mention another ‘victim’,

⁶⁴ Gans, *The Levittowners*, xxvii.

⁶⁵ “Levittown Youth Blames Riot on ‘Plain Boredom’,” *The Evening Bulletin*, January 23rd, 1963, 12.

⁶⁶ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 115.

broadly labeled as ‘cul-de-sac kids’.⁶⁷ As long as they live under the suburban roof of their parents, children of all ages seem to fall under this label. The basic definition is “a prisoner of a thoroughly safe and unchallenging environment.”⁶⁸ The general sentiment of ‘cul-de-sac kids’ is best summed up in a postcard sent to Frank Warren’s compilation project called *Postsecrets* where individuals anonymously send postcards to Warren and disclose a secret that has never been shared before. One particular book, *My Secret* (a sequel to the original *Postsecrets*) features a postcard that could have been sent from/to any suburb in America. Written in capital letters (spelling and grammar aside), it appears as follows:

SURPRISE!

ADOLESCENCE IS NOT AN EXITING ADVENTURE

IT’S ACTUALLY VERY BORING

AND LONLIER THAN YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE...⁶⁹

This postcard, if it were to arrive at its destination, would be received long after its best before date. If this is advice, chances are it is impossible to do anything about it. How exactly does an adolescent combat the boredom and loneliness imposed upon them by modernity, by the developers, and by their parents?

The authors of *Suburban Nation* claim that “those who have experienced adolescence in modern suburbia have their own stories of boredom and frustration.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., 116. For a commentary on the boredom experienced by adolescents at suburban high schools, see Thomas E. Linton and Erwin W. Pollack, “Boredom Transcended: Adolescent Survival in the Suburban High School,” *The High School Journal* 62(2), (November, 1978), 69-72.

⁶⁸ Ibid. In using the term ‘safe’ the authors are referring to the relative stability in the home where something such as economic concerns are not a matter of life and death.

⁶⁹ Frank Warren, *My Secret: A Postsecret Book* (New York: Regan, 2006), np.

⁷⁰ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 118.

James Howard Kuntsler recounts his awareness even as a teenager of the boring atmosphere that plagued suburban life:

As a teenager I visited my old suburban chums back on Long Island from time to time and I did not envy their lot in life. By puberty, they had entered a kind of coma. There was so little for them to do in Northwood, and hardly any worthwhile destination reachable by bike or foot, for now all the surrounding territory was composed of similar one-dimensional housing developments punctuated at intervals by equally boring shopping plazas.⁷¹

A coma is an appropriate metaphor for the boredom of suburbia. Much like the comatose patient lying in a hospital bed, there is no place to go. Duany et al. claim that “isolation and boredom is the outcome of an environment that fails to provide teenagers with the ordinary challenges of maturing, developing useful skills, and gaining a sense of self.”⁷² Duany et al. also note that in an effort to quash their boredom and instill a sense of responsibility and independence, these ‘cul-de-sac’ kids often take their weekly allowances and ask their parents to drive them to the mall.⁷³ Perhaps this association with the mall as a relief from boredom is why the City Manager of Lakewood, Colorado, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, believed boredom could be effectively combated with the appropriate space(s) of consumption.

Spaces of Consumption

The struggle against boredom for a teenager does not stop en route to the shopping mall or even when they arrive there. I argue that something is not only missing inside the home, but also outside the home. As for outside the home, these are the spaces that Marc Augé wrote about in his book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of*

⁷¹ Kuntsler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, 14.

⁷² Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 120.

⁷³ Ibid., 117.

*Supermodernity*⁷⁴ without referring to them as particularly relevant to the spaces of suburbia. Augé's concept of 'non-place' is useful for capturing the essence (or absence) of these spaces which constitute a fairly substantial portion of suburbia. While many spaces fit the concept, airports, shopping malls, and highways are the archetypal non-places.⁷⁵ I believe that these spaces can all be viewed as part of Lefebvre's urban fabric. These spaces are not ends in themselves, but are instead simply meant "to be passed through."⁷⁶ This effectively outlines the general characteristics of the other dominant spaces of suburbia besides their homes, those that foster transience. While Augé's book on 'non-places' is a key source for understanding spaces of suburbia, the most succinct explanation of non-places is given in one of Augé's later books:

The multiplication of what we may call empirical non-places is characteristic of the contemporary world. Spaces of circulation (freeways, airports), consumption (department stores, supermarkets), and communication (telephone, faxes, television, cable networks) are taking up room all over the earth today. They are spaces where people coexist or cohabit without living together, where the status of consumer or solitary passenger implies a contractual relation with society.⁷⁷

This calls to mind a passage of Jean Baudrillard's from the fourth installment of his *Cool Memories* diaries where he offers the prophecy that "the future airport will be 75 miles from Paris."⁷⁸ The idea being that the urban fabric will continue to grow to such an extent that one will not be able to say "I'm flying into Paris" since the airport will be so far away from the city centre. At the same time, if this were to happen, it would nevertheless remain a part of Paris. This would extend the range of transitional spaces,

⁷⁴ As is clear from the subtitle, Augé opts to use the term 'supermodernity' when discussing 'non-places' as opposed to other much more common terms such as modernity and postmodernity.

⁷⁵ Marc Augé, *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 96. Augé sums up the common link between these spaces by writing: "The traveller's space may thus be the archetype of *non-place*." 86.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁷ Augé, *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds*, 110.

⁷⁸ Baudrillard, *Cool Memories IV*, 25. This is not too far off from the present situation of airports, as many are on the outskirts of cities as opposed to being in the centre of the city.

thus creating even more spaces that could be deemed to be non-places. This suburbanization would entail that commuting time increase substantially.

Commuting

Commuting is an essential component of suburbia. Commuting is a standard part of the workday and is dictated by the time-schedule afforded by the suburban home. One of the key features of suburban living in general is the centrality of automobiles. At the centre of the periphery, so to speak, is an “auto-dependent lifestyle.”⁷⁹ Mumford explains how

[u]nder the present suburban regime, every urban function follows the example of the motor road: it devours space and consumes time with increasing friction and frustration, while, under the plausible pretext of increasing the range of speed and communication, it actually obstructs it and denies the possibility of easy meetings and encounters by scattering the fragments of a city at random over a whole region.⁸⁰

Further to Mumford’s point, in an article on ‘mundane’ roadways, Tim Edensor refers to the daily commute to work for so many individuals as “drivetime” and argues that it “might be understood to epitomize mundane, everyday time.”⁸¹ The commuters of today, at least those in automobiles, often take the opportunity during ‘drivetime’ to listen to the radio, talk on the phone/send text messages (legally or otherwise), apply makeup, and even catch up on their reading. Once upon a time, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the eight-hour workday became common such as was the case with Fordism, this effectively freed up “two hours daily for the pursuit of happiness,”⁸² whatever that may be. With the rise of a ‘suburban nation’, these two hours can no

⁷⁹ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 127. Lefebvre argues that this is to the detriment of society: “Owners of private cars have a space at their disposition that costs them very little personally, although society collectively pays a very high price for its maintenance.” PS, 359.

⁸⁰ Mumford, *The City in History*, 507.

⁸¹ Tim Edensor, “M6 Junction – 19-16: Defamiliarizing the Mundane Roadscape,” *Space & Culture* 6(2), (May, 2003): 154.

⁸² Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 125.

longer be spent as free time, but have been gradually recuperated back into the working day because of the time demands of the daily commute to work.⁸³ In addition, leisure activities require commuting as well since suburban tract housing space is often specialized to accommodate one type of space: houses. Going to a movie or to the mall virtually demands an automobile as the mode of transportation. One estimate claims that four out of five trips in an automobile are not spent on the “wasteful commute,” but spent doing other activities such as going shopping, taking kids to school, and going to the park.⁸⁴ All of these activities were accessible by foot in the not too distant past.

Commuting is not the only source of boredom behind the wheel. That is to say, being inside an automobile is itself not the only source of boredom. Long journeys across country in an automobile will surely induce fits of boredom because of the vastness of the urban fabric one must encounter. Not surprisingly, car manufacturers have installed television screens in various models as something to distract from the monotony of the open road. In his book *Reading the Everyday*, Joe Moran quotes one comment from the narrator of the film *London Orbital* that articulates a highway that is a pure example of the link between the open road and boredom:

More than other motorways, the M25 is designed to test thresholds of boredom.... It is mainline boredom, it is true boredom, a quest for transcendental boredom, a state that offers nothing except itself, resisting any promise of breakthrough or story. The road becomes a tunneled landscape, a perfect kind of amnesia.⁸⁵

The M25 (aka London Orbital) is suburban by virtue of its spatial configuration as a highway that surrounds the city of London. Although, it should be said, that following Lefebvre, it is also urban as it is an extension of the urban fabric. While the M25 appears

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁸⁵ Moran, *Reading the Everyday*, 101.

to be a pure representation of the experience of boredom while driving in a European context, I would argue that countless roadways throughout North America, too, offer little in the way of interesting landscapes. Following the above quoted passage, Moran makes a key point that is applicable to all studies of boredom. While driving on the M25 may indeed be ultra boring, studying this boredom creates a shift from experience to analysis. Thinking about one's boredom has the potential to lead to having interest in this boredom.

In his book *The Geography of Nowhere*, James Howard Kunstler describes the ideal type of suburban streets from a planning standpoint. It is evident from this example that there is a considerable gap as far as perfection is concerned between the design from a planning perspective and a living perspective. That is to say, there is a gap between the planners of a space and the people who use them.

The perfect modern suburban street has no trees planted along the edge that might pose a hazard to the motorist incapable of keeping his Buick within the thirty-six-foot-wide street. The street does not terminate in any fixed objective that might be pleasant to look at or offer a visual sense of destination – no statues, fountains, or groves of trees. Such decorative focal points might invite automotive catastrophe, not to mention the inconvenience of driving around them. With no trees arching over the excessively wide streets, and no focal points to direct the eye, and cars whizzing by at potentially lethal speeds, the modern suburban street is a bleak, inhospitable, and hazardous environment for the pedestrian.⁸⁶

This description could double as the background material for a post-apocalyptic movie script or novel. Uniformity is the key to this archetypal modern suburban street. Such a depiction of a suburban street is an important example of the Lefebvorean triad of homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchization. That is, the suburban street is the space where everyone has to drive an automobile (homogeneous), they are isolated from one

⁸⁶ Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, 50. Both Haussmann and Le Corbusier's influence can be seen here.

another (fragmentary), and some cars are more expensive than others (hierarchy).⁸⁷ This triad is linked to the ideology of functionalism. It is clear that the streets are purely functional in their design and implementation. Specifically, they are functional for automobiles. For the pedestrian, a great deal of risk is involved when venturing down the street.

In the book *Suburban Nation*, the authors go against the grain of the common critique of suburban streets as being boring because of the planner's slavish adherence to the straight line. They argue that this is a myth that can be dispelled by looking at the straight streets in two cities: San Francisco, California and Savannah, Georgia. True, when looked upon from above, such as from an airplane flying overhead, or, better yet, looking at a map, these two cities appear to have straight streets. It is only when one is actually walking the streets of these cities does one come to the realization that they are not quite straight. The authors neglect to mention that the streets of San Francisco are known around the world for their rolling hills. While they are straight forwards and backwards, they have immense curves going upwards and downwards. A similar, yet ultimately different problem occurs when the authors fail to mention the details in Savannah's design. The overhanging trees that James Howard Kuntsler noted were absent from modern suburban streets are everywhere in Savannah. One cannot, of course, see these on a standard map, one has to actually be there, walking those streets and not driving through them. From this, the following hypothesis arises: Walking the streets of an urban or suburban area is a different experience than both driving through them and looking at a map can provide.

⁸⁷ In his book *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Lefebvre identifies the automobile as the "epitome of objects," which not only dominates everyday life, but also "fosters hierarchies" based on the size, cost, speed, age, and performance of the vehicle. ELMW, 100-101.

This brings a theme from the previous chapter back into focus: walking in the city.⁸⁸ A key distinction between the metropolis and its suburbs is the difference in necessary automobile usage and necessity of walking. Jane Jacobs describes the impact automobiles have had on everyday life for those who live in the suburbs:

We are all familiar with the great need for automobiles in suburbs. It is common for wives in suburbs to chalk up more errand mileage in a day than their husbands chalk up in commuting mileage. Duplication of car parking is also familiar in suburbs: the schools, the supermarkets, the churches, the shopping centers, the clinics, the movie, all the residences, must have their own parking lots and all this duplicate parking lies idle for much of the time.⁸⁹

Walking in suburbs appears to be to and from the car. From this depiction it is evident that a considerable amount of space is reserved for automobiles, much more so than for pedestrians. Single, double, even triple car garages attached to the home with a driveway leading out of the cul-de-sac onto a highway and eventually flowing into one of the many parking spaces available across the vast sprawl. Such parking spaces are most prominent outside retail stores.

Shopping Centres

For the retail store, as a non-place, the monotony of a blurred soundscape is a difficult problem to combat. When heard above the white noise of cash registers, buzz of the lights, and chatter of shoppers and employees, the music being piped into the showrooms is mass-produced like the commodities on the shelves. While employees at independently owned stores often have the autonomy to select the music that they are going to listen to while they work, workers at big box and chain stores are not so lucky. Having been an employee at one of these stores (The Bay) I can confirm that the same

⁸⁸ As for everyday life, one of the most influential writings on the theme of ‘walking in the city’ can be found in Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* on pages 91-110.

⁸⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 464.

compact discs are often played over and over again ad nauseam. If not CDs or mp3s, Top 40 radio stations are a suitable substitute. Similar to how the function of CDs set to ‘repeat’ will play the same songs ad infinitum, Top 40 stations play a fairly narrow list of songs with a gradual shift in the overall lineup contingent upon the latest and greatest pop songs being released. Going from one’s car into the shopping centre can be seamless in an auditory sense if the radio stations in both areas synch up. The repetition of sounds can be annoying as a customer, but they have far more impact on the employees who are not at liberty to come and go as they please. That is, if they want to keep their jobs. According to Tia DeNora in her study of the importance of music in everyday life, the employees at these larger retail stores often “get bored hearing the same tape over extended periods of time.”⁹⁰ These loops help create an atmosphere of monotony amongst all the ‘newness’ of the commodities and services available for purchase.

Shopping malls have been referred to as the “accidental capitals of suburbia” which “address,” or at least attempt to address, “the notorious suburban boredom among them.”⁹¹ In his book on consumer culture, Paco Underhill notes the evolution of the shopping centre from a primarily retail space consisting of department stores and small shops to the incorporation of a multifaceted shopping experience that integrates entertainment and dining. According to Underhill, malls today cannot be considered malls without also having movie theatres, video arcades, and vibrating chairs in addition to retail. What was the major driving force behind this? While Underhill explicitly notes

⁹⁰ Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 137. This can be contrasted with S. Wyatt and J.N. Langdon’s study from 1937, which found that for factory workers “gramophone music is an effective antidote to boredom. During the time when music was played the increase in output varied from 6.2 to 11.3 per cent., while the total daily output showed an increase of 2.6 to 6.0 per cent.” *Fatigue and Boredom in Repetitive Work*, 73.

⁹¹ William Severini Kowinski, *The Mall of America: an Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985), 139.

that consumer boredom is responsible for this shift, what is implicit in this assertion is that capitalism and its eternal quest for profit is adapting to the boredom of consumers.

There is an emphasis on increasing diversions in order to combat buyer boredom.

There must be a lot of people bored with shopping since the nonstore portion of malls – what is sometimes optimistically referred to as ‘entertainment’ – keeps becoming a bigger part of the mix. Once upon a time, a dank little video game arcade was considered sufficient. Today malls have taken on a lot of the burden of keeping suburban America diverted.⁹²

Following Underhill’s argument, it would appear as though these people may be bored with shopping, but not with shopping malls. What exactly are Americans being ‘diverted’ from? Underhill does not delve into such a question. I argue that it is the everyday that needs diversion in this scenario. The everyday is the ‘it’ people want to get away from. This is an ongoing struggle, as it seems that while attempts to creatively enact distraction may temporarily succeed with the transformation of a mall, this also entails keeping up with an equally creative boredom. Later in the same text, Underhill expands on his initial idea.

We baby boomers are in a postshopping mode, psychically speaking. We’re not as thrilled as we used to be at the mere prospect of buying, of being in the presence of multitudes of objects, talismans, fetishes, beautifiers, intensifiers, glorifiers, junk. If we needed it, we bought it, more than once. Now we’re feeling bought out. We’re bored.⁹³

Clearly, Underhill is not referring to all baby boomers here. Not everyone can afford to buy things they need – though I am suspicious of Underhill’s claim of ‘need’ – that they can buy it twice, if not more times. Underhill believes that this faith in the healing powers of consumption is unique to baby boomers and not to their elders or even the younger generations. While the previously mentioned ‘cul-de-sac kids’ refutes this

⁹² Paco Underhill, *Call of the Mall* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 85.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 205.

assertion, Underhill does make a valid point with regards to the increasing emphasis on entertainment at shopping centres.

George Ritzer argues that “there is a tendency for people to become bored and to be put off by too much machine-like efficiency in the settings in which they consume.”⁹⁴ As was the case with Paco Underhill’s analysis, the catch is that the production side of things is well aware of this and actively counteracts it, often with more machine-like efficiency. Ritzer notes that the “challenge for today’s cathedrals of consumption (as for religious cathedrals) is how to maintain enchantment in the face of increasing rationalization.”⁹⁵ This brings to the light the title of Ritzer’s book that this passage comes from: *Enchanting the Disenchanted World*. The suggestion seems to be applicable to the act of continuously applying paint to a rusting car whenever the rust spots appear. While the appearance may indicate a kind of newness, the rust will eventually resurface in due time. This rust is an apt metaphor for the suburban lifestyle in general.

David Harvey gives a broad synopsis of such a style of life by arguing that the suburban lifestyle is produced in a dialectical manner between its residents and the titans of lifestyle industries. Of course, they are not mutually exclusive, but often overlap one another. An owner of an SUV, for example, could also own or work at an SUV dealership. Regardless if one buys what they directly sell, there is an overall tendency amongst suburban dwellers to perpetuate this style of life.

An immense amount of effort, including the formation of a vast advertising industry, has been put into influencing and manipulating the wants, needs and desires of human populations to ensure a potential market. But something more than just advertising is involved here. What is required is formation of conditions of daily life that necessitate the absorption of a certain bundle of commodities and

⁹⁴ George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2005), 8.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

services in order to sustain it. Consider, for example, the development of the wants, needs and desires associated with the rise of suburban lifestyle in the United States after the Second World War. Not only are we talking about the need for cars, gasoline, highways, suburban tract houses and shopping malls, but also lawn mowers, refrigerators, air-conditioners, drapes, furniture (interior and exterior), interior entertainment equipment (the TV) and a whole mass of maintenance systems to keep this daily life going. Daily living in the suburbs required the consumption of at least all of that. The development of suburbia turned these commodities from wants and desires into absolute needs.⁹⁶

Harvey then goes on to state that 70% of the American economy is consumer based.⁹⁷

While the immense complexities of the current economic system fall well outside the scope of this dissertation, Harvey's point is simple to grasp and helps to sketch the driving forces behind everyday life. There is a need both real and perceived to continuously consume in order to reproduce both the suburbs and its lifestyle. Such has been the case since the first mass-produced suburbs and continues up until this very day.

While the material presented above is largely focusing on the 1950s and 1960s, it can be argued that suburbs have not changed very much since then. While the cars are newer, the houses have more electronics, and the shopping centres have expanded, it would be incorrect to place too much weight on the discontinuities that have emerged in the intervening decades from then until now. To illustrate the similarity, a passage from David Harvey's 2010 book *The Enigma of Capital* will be beneficial. Harvey offers an outline of a typical suburb from 2005, in which he highlights the complexities of this spatial formation and its predominant mode of life. To begin, Harvey offers a description of the makeup of the typical suburb:

The population is relatively homogenous (mainly white but with a scattering of educated African Americans and equally educated recent immigrants from countries as diverse as India, Taiwan, South Korea and Russia) and reasonably

⁹⁶ David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 106-107.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

affluent. The suburban tract housing is laid neatly out and the schools, supermarkets and shopping malls (incorporating entertainment functions), medical facilities and financial institutions, gas stations and auto showrooms, sports facilities and open spaces are all within easy driving distance.⁹⁸

Much the same as the suburbs constructed in the years following World War II, homogeneity of its people with regards to class and ethnicity have been maintained. The automobile is a key tool for getting to and from the spaces of consumption and production. The general ethos of the residents is perpetuated with leisure and work. Harvey continues:

Local employment is heavily involved in services (particularly finance, insurance and real estate, software production and medical research) and whatever production there is, is either oriented to supporting a middle-class suburban lifestyle (a car repair, garden centres, ceramics, carpentry, medical equipment) or involved in the reproduction or further production of the built environment (all facets of the construction industry and its suppliers such as plumbers, roofers and road menders). The tax base is stable and adequate and the local administration, apart from engaging in the usual suburban practices of cosyng up to construction interests and developers, is reasonably efficient. Commuting times are longish but bearable, particularly with the help of all that electronic equipment that turns the interior of a car into an entertainment centre. Daily life is reasonably well ordered, apart from a few scandalous family break-ups or egregious crimes; social relations are individualistic but loosely integrated through social forms, particularly those associated with the churches, schools and golf clubs. Home ownership (mortgage induced and tax subsidized) is widespread, which guarantees that the defence of individual housing value is a collective norm, upheld by homeownership associations, even in the midst of plenty of isolated individualism. The houses are all laden with different kinds of electronics and of course everyone has iPods and cell phones which are in perpetual use.⁹⁹

This passage is an exemplary portrait of suburbia. In the second to last sentence, Harvey mentions its 'isolated individualism'. This is a key term for demonstrating Lefebvre's triad of homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchization. One simple way of putting it is, the same lifestyle (homogeneous) is being sought by countless individuals (fragmentary),

⁹⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 149-150

each trying to get ahead in life (hierarchical). While this applies to virtually everyone in suburbia, the most isolated of all individuals is the bored housewife.

Suburban Housewives: Sentenced to Everyday Life

The bored housewife is a stereotypical portrayal of many women living in the suburbs, but the boredom literature rarely takes note of this in any depth. Instead, a general malaise of suburbia is highlighted, such as in the following passage from Orrin E.

Klapp in his book *Overload and Boredom*:

One can feel cut off or sealed in even in a suburb, with its newly planted trees, tidy lawns, and cleans streets. And people themselves can give the feeling in “one-layer” communities, such as suburbs or mobiles home parks, where there is only one kind of people who think and act pretty much alike. In such a case, the feeling is of a certain sterility.¹⁰⁰

While this passage from Klapp is important for sketching the general contours of suburban life, it fails to articulate the specific circumstances of a suburban housewife.

While people in general have the ‘feeling of sterility’, specific types of people are lumped in to the same general category. There is no specific mentioning of the heightened sterility experienced by a suburban housewife in Klapp’s formulation. Conversely, Reinhard Kuhn discussed the figure of the ‘bored suburbanite’ at the beginning of his book *The Demon of Noontide*, albeit to denigrate it as a lesser experience than the boredom felt by more important individuals. Kuhn portrays the boredom of a suburbanite as a superficial experience, one that is not worthy of serious, scholarly consideration.

Kuhn argues that

[s]he is tired of the magazine that she is reading or the television show that she is watching and mixes another cocktail for herself. Or perhaps she telephones and equally bored friend and they talk for hours about nothing, or perhaps she drifts into an affair that means as little to her as the television show or the magazine article.

¹⁰⁰ Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, 65.

Further down the same page, Kuhn concludes that the boredom that ails the typical housewife is “a problem for the psychologist, and the victim of this malady is a prospective patient for the psychiatrist,” thus ultimately claiming that it “represents a primarily medical problem.”¹⁰¹ It is a matter to be treated by a specialist who can provide the proper treatment and/or medication. Kuhn was not alone with his assessment, as this view of the suburbanite’s boredom was so widespread that it was even portrayed on a novelty greeting card. The card, adorned with a woman’s distressed face, features the caption “I’m bored, send drugs.”¹⁰² In this view, it is a personal matter that can be dealt with via pharmaceuticals rather than one that ought to be considered as a deeper reflection of a widespread societal problem. Kuhn’s argument for the inferiority of this type of boredom (in comparison to the profundity of ennui) is predicated upon his impression of the inferiority of the bored subject. To sum up his position, he is arguing that a bored suburbanite is inconsequential to the study of boredom because she is a bored woman.

It is none other than Elizabeth Goodstein who sets Kuhn upright. Goodstein summarized the problems with Kuhn’s dismissal of the ‘bored suburbanite’ quite nicely as follows: “If Kuhn’s claims are read in historical context,” argues Goodstein, “his purported ability to distinguish ennui from quotidian, or everyday boredom on empirical grounds appears as an ideological maneuver that effectively excludes women and the working class from the realm of cultural production and philosophical reflection.”¹⁰³ Kuhn’s approach, as was argued in the first chapter, is an ahistorical one that neglects

¹⁰¹ Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 7.

¹⁰² The card is produced by a UK company called Kiss Me Kwik. They also manufacture coffee mugs with the same message displayed on the exterior of the mugs.

¹⁰³ Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 61.

historically specific situations and/or circumstances. As well, as Goodstein argues, Kuhn's reflections fail to incorporate other classes and genders, and what is ultimately presented is a fairly myopic perspective that effectively excludes the importance of everyday life. Kuhn's limited portrayal of the bored housewife can be compared to Nietzsche's aphorism 'boredom' from his book *Human, All Too Human* where he states that "many people, especially women, never feel boredom because they have never learned to work properly."¹⁰⁴ Such a perspective, shared by Kuhn and Nietzsche, is best summarized by Simone de Beauvoir who, in her book *The Second Sex*, writes: "Woman in truth represents the everyday aspects of life; she is silliness, prudence, shabbiness, boredom."¹⁰⁵ Following de Beauvoir and Goodstein, it is clear that Kuhn effectively formed a triad of women-silliness-boredom in which a woman's boredom is mediated by her silliness. This is an unfortunate error on Kuhn's part, one that oversimplifies an experience that is highly complex.

Throughout this chapter, the Lefebvorean triad of homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchization has been emphasized as a key for understanding the widespread production of specific spaces and lifestyles after the World War II that are conducive to an 'indelible boredom'. In this section, I argue that if there is a human figure that embodies this Lefebvorean triad it is the bored suburban housewife. In this case, the homogeneous element is perhaps the most apparent aspect from the Lefebvorean constellation since it can be seen by anyone who wanders, or, more likely, drives, into an

¹⁰⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 151. For examinations specifically geared towards analyzing women and boredom, see Jie Lu, "Boredom: the Female Experience of Time," In *Dismantling Time: Chinese Literature in the Age of Globalization*, (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academy, 2005), 83-108; Patrice Petro, "Historical Ennui, Feminist Boredom," In *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (London: Routledge, 1996), 187-199.

¹⁰⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 187.

area dominated by suburban tract housing. As was discussed above, the uniformity of homes is a well-known facet of suburban life. While not spending all of her time in her home, suburban housewives would spend the most amount of time in this particular space when compared with, say, their children who attend school and their husbands who work outside the home. The fragmentary aspect is apparent with the isolated nature of suburban living. The hierarchy stems from the gender inequality between husbands and wives during the birth of the suburbs after the Second World War. This is consistent with the path-breaking work of Betty Friedan on the complex, yet often overlooked, everyday life of the suburban housewife.

At the beginning of this chapter, Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* was mentioned as a key source linking boredom and the suburbs. Friedan's text is filled with both indirect and direct references to boredom.¹⁰⁶ It should be mentioned that the difference between suburban housewives and urban housewives is merely a matter of emphasizing certain elements. It is not as if there is no continuity between the two simply because they live in different spaces. The suburban housewife is more of an 'ideal type' in the Weberian sense of the term. Friedan explains that a move from the big city to a suburb was not accompanied by a substantial shift from a total absence of boredom to its omnipresence. No, Friedan gives an example of a bored housewife who resides in the city, makes the transition to suburban life, and is met with the same feeling of utter emptiness, or, as Elizabeth Goodstein would say, the same 'experience without qualities'.

¹⁰⁶ Friedan describes her boredom with writing articles on breastfeeding and related topics for the magazines *Redbook* and *Ladies' Home Journal* as part of the reason for writing the book, 45. Her boredom, then, inspired her to investigate the boredom of American housewives.

The woman with two children, for example, bored and restive in her city apartment, is driven by her sense of futility and emptiness to move, “for the children’s sake,” to a spacious house in the suburbs. The house takes longer to clean, the shopping and gardening and chauffeuring and do-it-yourself routines are so time-consuming that, for a while, the emptiness seems solved. But when the house is furnished, and the children in school and the family’s place in the community has jelled, there is “nothing to look forward to,” as one woman I interviewed put it. The empty feeling returns, and so she must redecorate the living room, or wax the kitchen floor more often than necessary – or have another baby. Diapering that baby, along with all the other housework, may keep her running so fast that she will indeed need her husband’s help in the kitchen at night. Yet none of it is quite as real, quite as necessary, as it seems.¹⁰⁷

Friedan is here writing about what she famously referred to as the ‘problem that has no name’.¹⁰⁸ Household chores and running errands in this scenario appear to temporarily relieve the perceived emptiness, but something is always missing. In what is perhaps one of the most famous passages from Friedan’s book,¹⁰⁹ she here outlines the ‘problem that has no name’.

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – “Is this all?”¹¹⁰

This simple, yet complex, little question is a widespread utopian longing for content.

Further to this, Friedan asks the probing question: “Why have so many American wives suffered this nameless aching dissatisfaction for so many years, each one thinking she

¹⁰⁷ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 345. While Friedan has been criticized for focusing on white women, it has been noted that “In the early 1970s some suburban black women embraced the feminine mystique with gusto, at least for a while. Others stayed home but felt bored and constrained.” Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 214.

¹⁰⁸ Lefebvre has similarly theorized that “[t]here is no greater alienation than the alienation which cannot speak its name.” IM, 194. This is similar to Friedan in at least two ways. 1) Having a problem without being able to pinpoint the cause; 2) Not being able to discuss the issue with others.

¹⁰⁹ For example, Ben Highmore selected this passage as part of his *Everyday Life Reader* as a key to Friedan’s overall argument. See chapter 5, 58-62.

¹¹⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 57.

was alone?”¹¹¹ After much consideration of ‘the problem that has no name’, Friedan claims to have arrived at the realization that it is not an outlier, or insignificant in the number it afflicted, but was actually widespread and experienced by countless women throughout all of America.¹¹² Similar to Friedan, this experience of the common suburban housewife has been described by the sociologist S. D. Clark – with an eye towards a specifically Canadian context – as “a feeling of being caught in a net from which escape was impossible.”¹¹³ Such an experience is surely without qualities.

As for Lefebvre, he has articulated a similar problem to the ‘problem that has no name’ when he writes: “I would ask you if you had ever experienced those hours when everyday life produces a malaise, when the mind pursues an idea which it dares not confront.”¹¹⁴ This is a common link between Lefebvre’s work and Friedan’s. As well, Friedan explicitly linked her concept of ‘the problem that has no name’ with everyday life. Both Lefebvre and Friedan were writing in the 1960s on this matter, which was unique at the time amongst scholars. Friedan notes the problem as follows: “Instead of destroying the old prejudices that restricted women’s lives, social science in America merely gave them new authority.”¹¹⁵ This brings the Levittown study back into the picture. Though not referencing Gans’ work, Friedan is highly critical of such studies. To Friedan, they do not capture the experience of housewives because their methodological approaches are severely flawed. Instead, these studies were geared towards men to answer the questions as they see fit. Women (housewives) and children (cul-de-sac kids) were not accorded the same status.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 79.

¹¹² Ibid., 63.

¹¹³ S.D. Clark, *The Suburban Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 152.

¹¹⁴ IM, 16.

¹¹⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 195.

How severe was the boredom of housewives in Friedan's view? Referring to soldiers with brain injuries as "doomed to the inhuman hell of eternal dailyness" Friedan draws a parallel with housewives:

The housewives who suffer the terror of the problem that has no name are victims of the same deadly "dailyness." As one of them told me, "I can take the real problems; it's the endless boring days that make me desperate." Housewives who live according to the feminine mystique do not have a personal purpose stretching into the future. But without such a purpose to evoke their full abilities, they cannot grow to self-realization. Without such a purpose, they lose the sense of who they are, for it is purpose which gives the human pattern to one's days.¹¹⁶

These housewives seem to be suspended in time and frozen in space. I would like to highlight Friedan's line that 'they cannot grow to self-realization'. The potential is there, but it is extremely difficult to realize. This is similar to Lefebvre when he writes of such women that "[b]ecause of their ambiguous position in everyday life – which is specifically part of everyday and modernity – they are incapable of understanding it."¹¹⁷ This is a source of frustration in both Lefebvre and Friedan's work who together believe that there is great potential for emancipation from this 'problem that has no name', but their inability to name the problem is also why they cannot escape the problem. This is a testament to the profundity of this boredom. This 'problem without a name' is a longing for that light to appear at the end of the tunnel. The dim glow this light indicates that the immediate future is hardly bright, if it can be seen at all. This light represents a simple glimmer of hope for something else, something different, something better. This longing is for something outside of the advertisements that claim to point the way to a happy life. Friedan argues that the "happy modern housewife as she is described by the magazines

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 433.

¹¹⁷ ELMW, 73.

and television” are “mystical creatures.”¹¹⁸ These images offer an impossible, unattainable goal for their readers or viewers to strive for. If one were able to recreate the image found in a magazine after countless hours of work and money spent acquiring the right look, the proper house, the suitable car, the image will have drifted away. As soon as one thinks they have caught up, the finish line has changed position.

For Lefebvre, where Friedan does not go far enough is her inability to see the connections between the plight of women with the capitalist mode of production/consumption. Lefebvre makes this point about Friedan in his book *The Survival of Capitalism* when he writes that Friedan often “penetrate[s] these slippery slopes, without seeing the connections or the global configuration.”¹¹⁹ Despite their differing intellectual foundations, Friedan (feminism) and Lefebvre (Marxism) share a common concern for women in general.¹²⁰ Women’s magazines are such a link Friedan shares with Lefebvre. For example, he writes: “the best examples of social make-believe are to be found neither in films nor in science fiction, but in women’s magazines.”¹²¹

This can be extended by Friedan:

Judging from the women’s magazines today, it would seem that the concrete details of women’s lives are more interesting than their thoughts, their ideas, their dreams. Or does the richness and realism of the detail, the careful description of small events, mask the lack of dreams, the vacuum of ideas, the terrible boredom that has settled over the American housewife?¹²²

¹¹⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 333.

¹¹⁹ SC, 73.

¹²⁰ The third volume of Lefebvre’s *Critique* was originally going to be titled and focused on the *Situation of Women in the Modern World*. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 117. This is consistent with Tom Conley’s assertion that “Lefebvre’s politics contain a nascent feminism.” Tom Conley, “Henri Lefebvre,” *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 577.

¹²¹ ELMW, 85.

¹²² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 107.

Friedan goes on to write: “The growing boredom of women with the empty, narrow image of the women’s magazines may be the most hopeful sign of the image’s divorce from reality.”¹²³ This boredom, then, is not a simple case of someone incapable of locating something productive to do with her time. Rather, this boredom is an awakening to the ideological mechanisms at work in the production of a mythical, yet ultimately unattainable, image of what a woman should be. In a certain sense, it is like opening a doorway to another world. The difficulty is recognizing one’s ability to crossover to the other side.

After having argued for the parallels between the feminism of Friedan and the Marxism of Lefebvre, it is now appropriate to return to a thread that was suspended in the second chapter, Laurie Langbauer’s analysis of Lefebvre’s work. Langbauer’s criticism of Lefebvre’s conception of everyday life is particularly scathing when it comes to his portrayal of women. Essentially, Langbauer argues that Lefebvre relegates women to the margins of everyday life. In actuality, Lefebvre was so concerned with the situation of women in everyday life that he believed the hope of the world lie with women creating a revolution in everyday life. He envisioned a ‘new Eve’, which was a theoretical construct, yet one that was based on real women Lefebvre came across. He describes this utopian figure as follows:

This new Eve is still beautiful and desirable, her body has kept its youthfulness. By cultivating her own sensuality and feelings, she has risen above the level of her own physiological and social functions, which hitherto had defined her; she has become a human being, therefore she is no longer limited by her own alienation. As an individualized human being who can assume ‘functions’ without being eliminated by them, who can overcome time, who can fight time and create a new time, this woman is one of modernity’s most extraordinary conquests, although it is still insecure, limited, and poorly understood (even by

¹²³ Ibid., 119.

women themselves). And it is this new woman who gives us hope for 'modernity'.¹²⁴

While it is true that Lefebvre argued that women as a whole occupy a different sphere of everyday life than their male counterparts, Langbauer takes this as a lacuna in Lefebvre's work as opposed to one of its strengths. As is evident from Lefebvre's above prescription of a new Eve as the saviour of modernity, Lefebvre held women in high esteem.

Lefebvre's portrayal is best encapsulated when he writes: "It weighs more heavily on women, who are *sentenced to everyday life*, on the working class, on employees who are not technocrats, on youth – in short on the majority of the people, yet never in the same way, at the same time, never all at once."¹²⁵ What is so perplexing about Langbauer's critique is her defense of a feminist position contra Lefebvre while Lefebvre's work has also been cited approvingly by other feminist scholars. Although they only mention him briefly, Lefebvre's work, at least his preceding passage, inspired Leslie Johnson and Justine Lloyd to title their book *Sentenced to Everyday Life*.¹²⁶ With this, one can differentiate between the general orientation of Lefebvre's work from the general thrust of Kuhn's work. While it has been argued above that Kuhn excluded women from his analysis of profound boredom (or as he calls it 'ennui'), Lefebvre specifically wanted to incorporate the specific situation of women into his analysis in order to have a deeper understanding of everyday life in the modern world.

Technology and the Peripheries

In his lengthy writings on modernity, *Introduction to Modernity*, Lefebvre asks a probing question regarding the relationship between technology and boredom:

¹²⁴ IM, 152.

¹²⁵ EE, 10. (my italics)

¹²⁶ Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 2004).

“Organized along the lines of a railway network or a system of traffic lights, would not the cybernetic society be a society which raised boredom to the level of a dangerously invisible yet omnipresent institution?”¹²⁷ This is a key insight of Lefebvre’s. In this formulation, boredom is both everywhere and nowhere. Lars Svendsen argues that boredom has become further entrenched throughout modernity with the emergence and advancement of various technologies:

Anthropocentrism gave rise to boredom, and when anthropomorphism was replaced by technocentrism, boredom became even more profound. Technology involved the dematerialization of the world, where things disappear into pure functionality. We have long since passed a stage where we could keep track of technology. We curry along behind, as is perhaps particularly clear in IT, where hardware and software have always become obsolete before most of the users have learned how to use them.¹²⁸

To use a McLuhanesque phrase, it is the extensions of (hu)man that have extended boredom. And, of course, technology seems to continuously evolve into newer, faster, bigger, smaller things. As Kostas Axelos puts it, “[t]echnology irresistibly advances.”¹²⁹ With the advancement of technology and ‘technocentrism’, it would follow that boredom will become further and further entrenched into the fabric of everyday life. Once technology has been acquired, it becomes difficult to escape its grasp of distraction. As Lefebvre notes, “Life outside technology does not participate. It contemplates, it admires, it gets bored.”¹³⁰ This gives rise to a paradox. By not participating in the use of technology, one can contemplate its boringness, but from the perspective of a different kind of boredom. Conversely, if one participates in technological use, one cannot

¹²⁷ IM, 222.

¹²⁸ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 88.

¹²⁹ Kostas Axelos, “Mondialisation Without the World,” *Radical Philosophy* 130 (March/April, 2005), 28.

¹³⁰ IM, 213. Further to this point, Sue Bowden and Avner Offer have argued that boredom is one of the “strong withdrawal symptoms” amongst habitual television watchers who are without a television. Bowden and Offer, “Household Appliances and the Use of Time,” 739-740.

contemplate its boringness outside of the boredom it instills. Acquiring the proper critical distance seems to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. To some, this ought to be a very serious concern for society.

Erich Fromm, for example, has noted the problems of boredom facing humanity with the overreliance on the latest technological advancements. Technology, for Fromm, has the potential for the opposite effect proposed by McLuhan with his 'extension of man' hypothesis. Humans are not extended through technology, but are stunted in growth. The technology is what gets extended as opposed to the human. In Fromm's view, this has dramatic implications for the future of society with regards to the experience of boredom.

The danger of the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is men may become robots. True enough, robots do not rebel. But given man's nature, robots cannot live and remain sane; they become "Golems"; they will destroy their world and themselves because they will be no longer able to stand the boredom of a meaningless life.¹³¹

Here, Fromm argues for the seriousness of boredom as a deeply existential problem facing countless individuals on a daily basis. If one were to make the transition to this figurative robot, total passivity would be realized. This calls to mind Baudrillard's seemingly fruitless search for a "genuine madman in the street," who does not require "a mobile phone to talk to himself."¹³² The idea here, amongst the humorous observation, is that the relationship between people and technology is becoming much more tightly intertwined as technological advances occur.

One of the most defining features of modernity is the emphasis on industrial technology. This technology was vital to the development of two of its chief ideologies –

¹³¹ Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture*, 101.

¹³² Baudrillard, *Cool Memories V*, 14.

Fordism and Taylorism – throughout the twentieth century, especially in the United States of America. While both Fordism and Taylorism are largely associated with industry, their intertwined ideologies are evident in the home in general, but the suburban home in particular. The mantra of efficiency in production can also be found at home. For example, at the beginning of the second volume of the *Critique*, Lefebvre noted the increasing importance of technology in everyday life, especially as it concerns housework:

The situation of the everyday per se has become increasingly serious. It is true that technology is penetrating it much more than it did twenty years ago, and it is impossible to ignore the importance of domestic science, for example; but we also know that technology and domestic science have not eliminated the most trivial aspects of everyday life; by reducing the time spent doing tedious chores technology raises very clearly the problem of available free time.¹³³

Free time is not easily acquired for a housewife, even with the technological advances and their proponents that claim they free up time. For example, in his book *The Consumer Society*,¹³⁴ Jean Baudrillard envisions the free time a housewife gains after the purchase of a brand new washing machine. Baudrillard imagines the time being spent watching television and seeing advertisements for washing machines.¹³⁵ In this scenario, consumption fuels consumption. The free time here is hardly spent away from the household chores. It seems to be a perpetual circuit where once one begins consuming, it is virtually impossible to stop. This brings Lefebvre's project back into the picture.

Lefebvre writes:

¹³³ CEL 2, 3.

¹³⁴ Lefebvre may have coined this term. In a public debate with Leszek Kolakowski, Lefebvre, in reference to the consumer society, said: "I believe myself to be the author of that term, but people have attributed the idea to different sources: some attribute it to [Kenneth] Galbraith and I don't know whom, but that's not important." In Leszek Kolakowski and Henri Lefebvre, *Reflexive Water*, 201.

¹³⁵ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 153. This loop of consumption is not unique to television, as Marc Augé notes that "commercial radio stations advertise big stores; big stores advertise commercial radio." *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso Press, 1995), 106.

Domestic appliances have certainly altered daily life. By opening it out on the world? Quite the reverse: they have aggravated its closure, by reinforcing repetitive everydayness and linear processes – the same gestures around the same objects. Let us note once again that ‘household’ appliances have not liberated women; they have made liberation movements possible by alleviating daily drudgery. Only then did specific demands regarding divorce, contraception, abortion, and freely chosen maternity emerge.¹³⁶

In Lefebvre’s formulation, while technological advances have taken place and have altered everyday life for many, they have not significantly elevated the everyday lives of women or men for that matter. Technological advances, nevertheless, have steadily become key components of everyday life, especially for those who live in the suburbs.

The shift in the emphasis on home technology that has occurred throughout the twentieth century is clear when one compares the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time, the household medium of choice was the radio and movie theatres were the most frequented entertainment mediums outside of the home. Siegfried Kracauer, writing about listening to the radio, argues that listening to the radio with headphones closes off the possibility of boredom.

Who would want to resist those dainty headphones? They gleam in living rooms and entwine themselves around heads all by themselves; and instead of fostering cultivated conversation (which certainly can be a bore), one becomes a playground for worldwide noises that, regardless of their own potentially objective boredom, do not even grant one’s modest right to personal boredom.¹³⁷

It is amazing that this passage was written over 80 years ago. If one did not know better, this passage could pass for having been written today. Are not these dainty headphones the calling card of the latest personal mp3 players? It is as if Kracauer is describing the infamous white ear buds that come standard with all versions of Apple’s iPod. Among many others, one key feature missing from Kracauer’s description when compared with

¹³⁶ CEL 3, 61.

¹³⁷ Kracauer, “Boredom,” 333.

an iPod is the presence of a screen, which, at the time, was in the realm of movie theatres and not the home. One key element amongst many of the technological advances that have occurred since Kracauer's time is the screen. With the increasing shift towards screen technologies such as televisions and computers, the two preferred types of entertainment of the early twentieth century (radio in the home; cinema outside the home) can both be found outside the home and inside the home.

As was mentioned in the second chapter, one of Lefebvre's preferred metaphors for everyday life is the screen. Not simply a clever metaphor, screens have gradually invaded everyday life. Kenneth T. Jackson notes that it was during the 1950s that television supplanted movies as the medium of choice for entertainment amongst most Americans.¹³⁸ This explosion of television sets in the home coincides with the explosion of suburbs in America. Lynn Spigel has claimed that the television set is "the quintessential medium of the suburban home."¹³⁹ Spigel has argued that "television meshed perfectly with the aesthetics of modern suburban architecture. It brought to the home a grand illusion of space while also fulfilling the 'easy living', minimal motion principles of functionalist housing design."¹⁴⁰ Much like a mirror, the television gives the impression that there is more space than there really is. However, unlike a mirror lying flush against a wall, the first generation of televisions were clunky, large boxes, so this illusion is an impressive one as it is clear that the television is actually taking up a considerable amount of space in a room. With the advancements in television technology the similarities with the mirror have become much more pronounced. As well as even

¹³⁸ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 282.

¹³⁹ Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 2.

¹⁴⁰ Lynn Spigel, "Installing the Television Set," in Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 327.

hanging on a wall like a mirror. In this case, it is as if one is looking through a window to the world.

After World War II, the rise of mass-produced suburbs on the outskirts of major cities rekindled a long-term American romance with the detached family home. Built largely for the white middle class, these mass-produced suburban developments became the ideal ‘terminals’ for a new traffic in media culture. Television, drive-in theaters, and corporate shopping centers brought previous forms of visual culture into the space of suburban family leisure, a pattern that seem inaugural for today’s more high-tech ‘information superhighway’ and World Wide Web, which promise to link all forms of public life to the private space of the family home.¹⁴¹

In order to further disseminate their message, instructions for optimal television viewing were provided by television manufactures in magazine articles and advertisements.

Spigel has referred to this as the “scientific management of the gaze in the home.”¹⁴² In order to maximize one’s enjoyment of this technology, special instructions were supposed to be followed. This articulates another functionalist aspect of modernity, the emphasis on structure and hierarchy in leisure time.

In his book *Bourgeois Utopias*, Robert Fishman has argued that suburbs, particularly those in the United States, are in the process of morphing into what he calls ‘technoburbs’. The term denotes the centrality of technology in suburban living. Fishman states that “television has proved to be the perfect medium for the technoburb.”¹⁴³ The number of televisions brought into homes across America over the course of the 1950s is substantial. At the beginning of the 1950s roughly 9% of all American homes owned a

¹⁴¹ Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, 3.

¹⁴² Spigel, “Installing the Television Set,” 332. Scientific management in the home is not restricted to the gaze of the television. Near the beginning of the twentieth century, Christine Frederick pioneered the integration of Taylorism with housekeeping. Her book, *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management*, fuses the time/motion management theory of Taylorism with household chores. The motivation behind this book was, as is made clear in the preface, to limit work time and increase leisure time, as Frederick “almost never had any leisure time to [herself].” Efficiency was Frederick’s solution to this widespread problem. *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1913), vii.

¹⁴³ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 201.

television set. By the end of the decade that amount grew to 90% and the average American at the time watched approximately five hours of television per day.¹⁴⁴ It would be difficult to speak of these percentages with any substantial degree of certainty today. Obtaining the same data today is much more difficult since television watching has become blurred. It can take place on a car ride, in the street, on the computer, etc.

It would seem that the suburbs and television go together like a hand in a glove. Perhaps this is why it makes so much sense to ‘sprawl’ on a couch in front of the television. Television programs have been representing suburban life since the advent of televisions and the suburbs. In particular, housewives have been portrayed on television for some time now, such as, what could be seen as the archetypal suburban housewife from the 1950s and 1960s, June Cleaver in *Leave it to Beaver*. ABC’s television show *Desperate Housewives* is a notable example of a present day depiction of housewives. The sexual promiscuity of the characters are certainly a departure from the ‘feminine mystique’ of June Cleaver. In yet another departure, the television channel Bravo currently produces a series of programs focusing on the ‘real’ housewives of certain regions: Orange County, New Jersey, Atlanta, etc. The term ‘real’ seems to mean ‘reality’, or nonfiction, and can be opposed to the fictitious characters in *Desperate Housewives*. Interestingly, the heroines of the *Real Housewives* series have been described as “botoxed, bored-stiff women shopping off their husbands’ enormous wealth and living in McMansions.”¹⁴⁵ These bored housewives are outliers as far as domestic everyday life is concerned, and can be opposed to the deep longing of the educated housewife portrayed by Friedan. There is a huge lifestyle disparity between the two

¹⁴⁴ Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, 33.

¹⁴⁵ Sarah Z. Wexler, *Living Large* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010), 148.

types. The television has distorted the image of a housewife beyond recognition. Robert Fishman explains this phenomenon as follows:

Since the 1950s television and the technoburb have been in alliance, each promoting the interests of the other. For television, the decentralized audience is the ideal audience, the perfect consumers of the standardized products that advertisements offer. In return, television has glorified the single family house as the standard American home, enshrined the low density neighborhood, and (perhaps not coincidentally) has provided an unrelenting negative picture of the city as the haven of crime and violence.¹⁴⁶

As part of living in fragmentary, atomistic houses, the connectivity via technology is heightened. Part of what makes the suburbs palatable for some is the ability to extend oneself (in the McLuhan sense of technology) into the surrounding world. The easiest, most efficient and least expensive way to do this is through the television.

The assertion that “television is the cheapest and least demanding way of averting boredom”¹⁴⁷ is almost a platitude today. Parents even use it as a quick fix for bored children. Instead of thinking of an alternative that would undoubtedly require much more effort, it is simple enough to place the kids in front of the television screen. Of course, it not just a remedy for a bored child. If a child is bored, the parent(s) can turn on the television to alleviate this boredom and that is that. However, repressing boredom is much more complicated than that. In what could be described as a ‘return of the repressed’, boredom also surfaces when one is watching television. As Patricia Meyer Spacks argues, “[w]e gaze at television to forestall boredom, and the television generates more of it.”¹⁴⁸ The antidote carries the affliction. It would seem as though television is an endless cycle of boredom and interest.

¹⁴⁶ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 201-202.

¹⁴⁷ Sue Bowden and Avner Offer, “Household Appliances and the Use of Time: The United States and Britain Since the 1920s,” *The Economic History Review* 47(4), (November, 1994): 735.

¹⁴⁸ Spacks, *Boredom*, 249.

It is important to note that all television programs are not created equal. Some are more thoughtful than others, some are more engaging than others, and some appeal to certain demographics more than others. In addition, it could be said that some are much more boring than others. This is a moot point to Susan Sontag who has argued that television is inherently boring. “The whole point of television,” argues Sontag, “is that one can switch channels, that it is normal to switch channels, to become restless, bored.”¹⁴⁹ With this, it is not just the passive viewing that facilitates the experience of boredom. The active participation of changing channels, too, invites boredom. In a related way, Adorno refers to television watching as “the dreamless dream.”¹⁵⁰ Such a statement recalls Luis Buñuel’s surrealist reflections on the suburbs mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

In his *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan has but one short reference to boredom, but it is nevertheless an important one. Here he notes an important transition between the initial impression of technology and its lingering response. He writes: “The effect of electric technology had at first been anxiety. Now it appears to create boredom.”¹⁵¹ If the initial sampling of a technology such as television instills a sensation of anxiety, its long, lingering aftertaste is one of boredom. Perhaps, in the case of television, the initial anxiety stemmed from the belief that the television is looking back at its owner. Lynn Spigel suggests that the cabinet doors that accompanied early televisions were designed to close off the television’s gaze. Spigel notes that such terms as ‘hypnotic eye’, ‘all seeing eye’, and ‘mind’s eye’ were all given to the television in its

¹⁴⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 106.

¹⁵⁰ Theodor Adorno, “Prologue to Television,” *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 49.

¹⁵¹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 43.

initial exposure to consumers.¹⁵² On the other side of things, looking towards the television, Arthur Kroker has labeled the television viewer's gaze as the 'bored eye'. Kroker elaborates this concept when he claims: "We watch the Web and download TV. We watch ourselves watching TV. We watch the screen watching us. We like the screen. It's our friend. It's our boredom."¹⁵³ It is no surprise, then, that "television not only enriches and enters the interwoven texture of everyday life, it represents it, too."¹⁵⁴ We are able to watch our everyday lives on television vicariously through soap operas, or even see our neighbours compete on a 'reality' television show. Anything and everything seems to be on television these days. It is not difficult to suppose that "reality is viewed through the filter of the television screen, that the meaning given quotidian life on the screen is reflected back upon everyday life itself."¹⁵⁵

While television and the broader category of technology are important to suburbia, everyday life is by no means fully automated with technological gizmos. If it were so, the infusion of Taylorism throughout society would be entirely realized. That is, the persistent striving for efficiency above all other considerations would realize the ideology of Taylorism through the increased use of efficient technologies. The importance of technology in everyday life, however, is considerable, as Lefebvre notes:

Only partially technicized, everyday life has not created its own specific style or rhythm. Unconnected objects (vacuum cleaners, washing machines, radio or television sets, refrigerators, cars, etc.) determine a series of disjointed actions. Small technical actions intervene in the old rhythms rather like fragmented labour in productive activity in general. The equipment of everyday life finds itself more or less in the same situation as industrial mechanization in its early stages, in the

¹⁵² Spiegel, "Installing the Television Set," 333.

¹⁵³ Arthur Kroker, *The Will to Technology & the Culture of Nihilism: Heidegger, Nietzsche, & Marx* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 36.

¹⁵⁴ John Fiske, "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life," *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (London: Routledge, 1992), 156.

¹⁵⁵ Adorno, "Prologue to Television," 52.

period when specific tools had unique and exclusive functions. If these gestures increase effectiveness – productivity – they also split things up; they truncate, they make mincemeat of everyday life; they leave margins and empty spaces. They increase the proportion of passivity.¹⁵⁶

This would entail the rise of a new class that Lefebvre has termed the ‘technocrats’. This is “Lefebvre’s term,” which, according to Gary Genosko, “refer[s] to those who would seek to make us and our surroundings more cybernetic, more systematic, more technocratic.”¹⁵⁷ For Lefebvre, it is a matter of everyday life synching with technology, which he notes in his writings on modernity.

Indeed, for many people, innovation in life is synonymous with technicity. Technical objects, be they scooters, IBM computers or interplanetary rockets, are passionately *interesting*; they give enormous pleasure and provoke a feeling of novelty, just as much by the way they function scientifically as by the way they can be used empirically.¹⁵⁸

On the next page in the same text Lefebvre picks up this thread:

So how does disappointment in technicity arise? From the fact that interest in it, like all interests, is quickly exhausted. As soon as we know how a technical object works and how to make it work, our concentration starts to wander. We must look for something else. If it is to be maintained, the technological sensibility needs ever-accelerating technological progress. Conversely, accelerated technological progress will destroy interest in technicity, only to renew it again. Technological progress forces the individual and social man to accept the constraints of technicity; he plays his part in this destiny forging ever forward without knowing where he is heading, and without needing to know. Pleasure in technology has very little to do with culture, although it may be seen as a fact of modern cultural life.¹⁵⁹

A little further in the same text Lefebvre notes, “times changed. Technology began penetrating everyday life; there were new problems.”¹⁶⁰ Jean Baudrillard similarly

¹⁵⁶ CEL 2, 75.

¹⁵⁷ This definition by Gary Genosko comes from his translator’s note in Jean Baudrillard, *The Uncollected Baudrillard*, 55. In an editorial note, Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden define Lefebvre’s term ‘technocrat’ as “a particular kind of bureaucrat who utilized, not always successfully, the power of technology in managing modern society. They had particular dominance in urban planning.” SSW, 137.

¹⁵⁸ IM, 88.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 89.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 123.

observes, “[t]oday it is quotidian reality in its entirety – political, social, historical and economic – that from now on incorporates the simulatory dimension of hyperrealism.”¹⁶¹

Best and Kellner, writing in a similar vein to Baudrillard and Lefebvre, put it this way:

“In recent decades, new technologies have emerged that have altered the pattern of everyday life and have powerfully restructured work, leisure, education, communication, politics, and personal identities.”¹⁶²

Lars Svendsen has argued that technology is a major catalyst in the societal expansion and retention of boredom in the modern world. While these reflections on technology are not specific to the suburbs, they serve as ideal examples, especially considering their label of ‘technoburbs’. Svendsen writes: “The problem is that modern technology more and more makes us passive observers and consumers, and less and less active players. This gives us a meaning deficit.”¹⁶³ There is a certain disconnect between active participation and passive observation imparted by the increased reliance on technology in everyday life. Lefebvre explains a typical scenario as follows:

Technology is omnipotent. With it, anything is possible. Put your trust in technology, that is, in the products of modern technology, which are involved in all of our everyday chores – all those demeaning, tiresome chores, like going to the office, taking the metro, sweeping floors, doing pieces of writing – and all those boring everyday things will be imbued with morning freshness if you put your trust in modern technology.¹⁶⁴

Computers, especially since the advent of the Internet as a widespread phenomenon, are much more current versions of the television in the sense of watching a screen.¹⁶⁵ This

¹⁶¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1983), 147.

¹⁶² Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, 13.

¹⁶³ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 29.

¹⁶⁴ KW, 102.

¹⁶⁵ Google has developed an application called the ‘Boredom Button’, which, if downloaded, becomes a part of the user’s web browser, and can be pressed at any time to be taken to a ‘random’ website. The logic

technology fills the everyday with something and it perpetuates the absence of meaning, or the absence of style. Baudrillard explains that the “[t]elevision says nothing but: I’m an image, everything’s image. The Internet and computers say nothing but: I’m information, everything’s information. It’s the sign making itself sign, the medium doing its own advertising.”¹⁶⁶ Of course, it does not stop with the television or computer screen, as Slavoj Žižek explains: “They – all this (often boring and repetitive) proliferation of gadgets – render most directly what Lacan called *objets petit a*.”¹⁶⁷ What Žižek is referring to is the unattainable *x* as theorized by Jacques Lacan. This is never it and neither will that be it. ‘It’ cannot be obtained because ‘it’ does not exist per se. The ‘object petit a’, I argue, is a helpful theoretical concept for analyzing the dialectic of newness and dullness with technology. What at first seems to be so satisfying inevitably morphs into a boring thing because it was produced in order to only temporarily satisfy its consumers. Today’s new is tomorrow’s dull. This has been made abundantly clear by Martin Parr and his collections of *Boring Postcards*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

A much more explicit link can be made between technology and the suburbs when one considers and contrasts it with a key figure of metropolitan life. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman offers such a consideration, which is a useful explanation for the shift in the practice of strolling from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century:

behind this is that if someone is bored, a random experience will alleviate that boredom. The technology itself is not considered as an accessory to boredom.

¹⁶⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Paroxysm: Interviews with Philippe Petit*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1998), 72.

¹⁶⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 20. Technological gadgets are not the only examples of the ‘objet petit a’. For an example of a specific commodity, see Žižek’s “Coke as object petit a,” in *The Fragile Absolute* (London: Verso Press, 2008), 19-36.

More than a century ago another Frenchman, the poet and critic Baudelaire, suggested that the right way to observe and make sense of the modern world is to stroll along the streets and past the shops of the urban metropolis. It is the *flâneur*, Baudelaire proposed, who has the best view of the true essence of modernity. Baudrillard tied the *flâneur* to the armchair in front of the TV set. The stroller does not stroll any more. It is the TV images, TV commercials, the goods and joys they advertise who now stroll, and run, and flow in front of the hypnotized viewer. Viewing is the only activity left to the former stroller. Baudelaire's stroller has turned into Baudrillard's watcher.¹⁶⁸

The stroller of yesteryear has been superseded by the surfer of today. Instead of strolling around the cityscape, Baudrillard's watcher channel surfs with the television along with surfing the Internet all from the comfort of home or a friend's place (couch surfing). Of course, the stroller still exists in the sense that people still walk around urban areas, but the suburban surfer is much more prevalent since the influx of televisions in the home. Below, Lefebvre uses his favourite metaphor of a screen to demonstrate the partial perspective offered to and consumed by a television viewer.

One need only 'see' the interest aroused in television by live news broadcasts. You take part in events as and when they happen. You watch the massacres and the dead bodies and you contemplate the explosions. Missiles and rockets shoot off before your eyes, heading toward their targets. You are there! – But no, you are not there. You have the slight impression of being there. Subjectivity! You are in your armchair in front of the little *screen*, well named insofar as it hides what it shows.¹⁶⁹

Televisions and couches (or armchairs) are major components of most suburban family rooms. The title of this room is important to note since it gives the connotation that that is where a family gathers. It is also interesting to note that this room is often referred to as a 'living room', as if this is where the living happens in a house. The family gathers there and lives there. Together, yet separate, each family member gazes at

¹⁶⁸ Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 154-155.

¹⁶⁹ RH, 81.

the events of the world on a daily basis. Lefebvre refers to this as the television giving the everyday a ‘worldwide dimension’, which he elaborates as follows:

Television allows every household to look at the spectacle of the world, but it is precisely this mode of looking at the world as a spectacle which introduces non-participation and receptive passivity. The idea that the audiovisual as it was lived in archaic communities (in scenes of magic) could be reconstituted is laughable and frivolous. The mass media strip the magic of presence from what was the presence of magic participation – real, active or potential. Sitting in his armchair, surrounded by his wife and children, the television viewer witnesses the universe. At the same time, day in and day out, news, signs and significations roll over him like a succession of waves, churned out and repeated and already indistinguishable by the simple fact that they are pure spectacle: they are overpowering, they are hypnotic. The ‘news’ submerges viewers in a monotonous sea of newness and topicality which blunts sensitivity and wears down the desire to know. Certainly, people are becoming more cultivated. Vulgar encyclopedism is all the rage. The observer may well suspect that when communication becomes incorporated in private life to this degree it becomes non-communication.¹⁷⁰

Here is another example of the homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchization triad. The whole family is there (homogeneity), though they are not communicating (fragmentation), and spaces are occupied according to rank such as the father in his armchair (hierarchization).

Lefebvre points out that “there are always new things, and better things, for doing the same thing.”¹⁷¹ With this, the question arises: Are these new (old) technologies really necessary? Necessity is debatable, but here the dialectical notion of new and old should be elaborated. It is a matter of seeing the continuities and discontinuities. Taking just one of these aspects into account will give only a partial view. In this case, it is fairly clear that they are not new in the sense that society has never seen something like them before. Conversely, they are new in the sense that they are a variation on a theme. The extent of the variation would itself vary. For Lefebvre, the impetus for the perpetual

¹⁷⁰ CEL 2, 76.

¹⁷¹ CEL 3, 162.

influx of new technologies is what he has referred to as the ‘bureaucratic society of controlled consumption’, which I will examine in the next chapter. For the time being, Lefebvre’s former associate Guy Debord has succinctly articulated the linkages between technology, everyday life, and capitalism as follows:

Many technologies do, in fact, more or less markedly alter certain aspects of everyday life – not only housework [...] but also telephones, television, music on long-playing records, mass air travel, etc. These developments arise anarchically, by chance, without anyone having foreseen their interrelations or consequences. But there is no denying that, on the whole, this introduction of technology into everyday life ultimately takes place within the framework of modern bureaucratized capitalism and tends to reduce people’s independence and creativity.¹⁷²

There are those, such as Jean Baudrillard, who take an extreme stance towards the quality of programming available on television or other, similar technologies: “At home, surrounded by information, by screens, I am no longer anywhere, but rather everywhere in the world at once, in the midst of a universal banality – a banality that is the same in every country.”¹⁷³ It is the banality that binds as far as homogeneity of viewer experience goes, but it also promotes fragmentation amongst viewers. Although Baudrillard is everywhere, he is also nowhere. Everywhere he is able to gaze with the aid of his army of screens he is not physically present. His experience is totally mediated by technology. With an eye on the future, Baudrillard writes:

One day the only people left on the streets will be zombies – one group with their mobile phones, the other with their headphones or video headsets. Everyone will be simultaneously elsewhere. They already are. In the past, you could isolate yourself internally. Now you can isolate yourself externally, can retreat into the outer core of your being. Confinement in prison is giving way to the mobile

¹⁷² Guy Debord, “Perspectives for Conscious Changes in Everyday Life,” In *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 94.

¹⁷³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), 151.

confinement of the network, just as *rigor mortis* has given way to the corpse-like flexibility of switching-man, protean man, Nietzsche's 'chameleon'.¹⁷⁴

To end this chapter, Baudrillard's mention of a zombie to begin the above passage

is worth consideration. While not specific to the suburbs, the aesthetic sameness throughout is entirely applicable to the suburban situation sketched above. In the film *Shaun of the Dead* (Directed by Edgar Wright, 2004), the protagonist (Shaun) gradually becomes surrounded by people infected with a flesh biting disease, which he does not notice until the zombies arrive at his home. How is it that the zombies went unnoticed? Shaun's daily routine – walking in the same areas of town, commuting on the same bus route, and going to the same convenience store, etc. – was so often filled with similar zombie-like characters, the difference between characters in the pre-zombie era and post-zombie era was negligible. The empty visages of the zombies are so similar to the bored faces of Shaun's fellow commuters that he is totally unaware of the discontinuity grafted onto his everyday life. It is not until the zombies attempt to eat his brain does Shaun break out of his everyday routine and thus ensues an extraordinary adventure of slaying and evading the persistent onslaught of zombies. While this movie is a work of fiction,¹⁷⁵ it not only demonstrates the linkages between boredom and everyday life, but it also serves as an example of boredom in entertainment. In the next chapter, this will be considered alongside Lefebvre's dialectic of boredom and interest mentioned at the conclusion of the first chapter.

¹⁷⁴ Baudrillard, *Cool Memories IV*, 24.

¹⁷⁵ In the everyday life external to fiction – that is to say, everyday life proper – there has been a connection made between boredom and zombies. Erich Fromm describes a lawyer who often worked twelve hour or more days and claimed he was never bored, as someone who has "unconscious boredom" where he does not know it, but he is bored. The Lawyer recounts the following dream: "I saw myself sitting at the desk in my office, but I felt like a zombie. I hear what goes on and see what people do, but I feel that I am dead and that nothing concerns me." Quoted in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 245-246. It was not until the lawyer could 'see himself' in his dream that he was able to realize the extent of his profound boredom.

Chapter 5: The Banality of Consumption

‘Boredom’, the absence or even temporary interruption
of the perpetual flow of attention-drawing, exciting novelties,
turns into a resented and feared bugbear of the consumer society.¹ – Zygmunt Bauman

The need for novelty and fresh stimulation becomes more and more intense,
intervening interludes of boredom increasingly intolerable.² – Christopher Lasch

Of course, the endless consumption of images results in disappointment and boredom,
because they only fulfill artificial rather than genuine human needs.³ – Michael Gardiner

* * * * *

The common thread running through these three passages from Bauman, Lasch, and Gardiner is the dialectical process at work in everyday life: the concurrent quest for meaningful content and the fear and inevitability of boredom. Interesting things are at the heart of this. The general orientation and purpose of this chapter is to expound the unity and simultaneous opposition between boredom and interest in the consumption of objects, sounds, and images. The objects of consumption will mediate between boredom and interest and can be represented in a triad of boredom-consumption-interest. It will be argued that the historically specific boredom of modernity is especially evident in the common, ordinary, everyday practice of consumption. Consumption is here used in a broad sense to denote the transmission of a message from an object to a subject. This is not to argue for a definitive causal chain from one to the other, as the message from the object was generated by a subject or subjects, who were in turn influenced by other subjects and other objects, and so on and so on. Since consumption is a broad signifier for an equally broad process, the point here is to identify certain key elements that are its general characteristics and can be located throughout the continuous process that

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 130.

² Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 521.

³ Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life*, 93.

facilitates the experience of both interest and boredom for consumers. If this chapter were to have a subtitle, a simple rearrangement of the title would suffice in order to convey the desired message. Along with the banality of consumption, this chapter will also examine the consumption of banality. It will be argued that these two processes are at the heart of everyday modernity.

The previous chapter developed two aspects of consumption that were important in order to begin this chapter. The first is the consumption outside of the home in suburban shopping centres – although this can be linked to shopping centres in general – and the second was the consumption that occurs inside the home in front of a television screen. Where the previous chapter concluded with some reflections on the dialectical relationship between technology and boredom, this chapter will focus on the dialectical relationship between the specifics of consumption that are promoted by these technologies. To use Marshall McLuhan's terms, these elements of the previous chapter were part of a discussion of the medium as the focal point, or, of the idea that 'medium is the message'. Instead of privileging the technological aspect such as McLuhan, I argue that both the technological apparatuses and the messages they convey have important implications for a discussion of boredom in everyday life. This chapter, then, is based on an analysis of the message from mediums as opposed to the medium as a message.

The main goal of this chapter is to discuss boredom and consumption by distinguishing between what the Frankfurt School has referred to as the 'culture industry' and its rejection and concurrent facilitation of boredom with the embrace of boredom by certain avant-garde movements. In order to analyze boredom and consumption, this chapter has been organized into five sections. The first section will sketch the affinities

between Lefebvre's theorizing of everyday consumption with the concept of the culture industry, which is a concept Lefebvre adopted in his later writings.⁴ This will serve as a general framework for the four sections that follow. The second and third sections primarily deal with sound whereas the fourth and fifth sections deal with images. The second section will incorporate Theodor Adorno's extended essay 'On Popular Music' as a window into the general tendencies of one key form of culture industry entertainment: popular music. To contrast the culture industry's version of sound, the third section is an examination of the avant-garde group Fluxus and their integration of boredom into their performance art pieces. The music of the movement's most famous member, John Cage, will be the focal point.⁵ Following this, I will shift from music and/or sound to images. The fourth section will discuss advertising, or what David Harvey has referred to as "the official art of capitalism,"⁶ and the use of boredom as a foil in order to sell objects. To illustrate this point I have collected five advertisements from major advertising campaigns that have employed boredom or the everyday in order to promote their products and the seemingly new lifestyles that come with their purchase. The fifth and final section will discuss the tension between the kitsch of the culture industry and the

⁴ This is especially evident in his last official volume on everyday life. See CEL 3, 12; 26; 41; 82; 94; 159. Perhaps Lefebvre's attraction to this concept is the common concern for the everyday, as Jameson has noted in reference to Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry essay, "the topic here is the commercialization of life, and the co-authors are closer to having a theory of 'daily life' than they are to having one of 'culture' itself in any contemporary sense." *Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2007), 144.

⁵ Linking John Cage with boredom is fairly easy, as Mike Sell has noted. Sell writes: "Cage's work exemplifies boring art and makes clear that just because something is boring, it is not necessarily insignificant. Boredom, after all, is an emotional state notable for its high degree of self-consciousness and awareness. The bored possess a kind of totalizing consciousness in petulant repose. As is insisted upon by the bored, absolutely nothing can inspire interest – it's hard to imagine a more totalizing belief. Yet this failure to imagine doesn't bring with it despair. The bored persist in their nervous, unproductive quest for something to entertain and can become, as any parent in the company of a bored child understands, quite disruptive. Perhaps it is this that so attracted Cage, an anarchist, to boredom." *Avant-Garde Performance & the Limits of Criticism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 87.

⁶ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 63.

avant-garde – in particular Andy Warhol’s Pop art which explicitly embraced boredom.

In addition to the concept of the culture industry/Lefebvrian model employed in the previous sections, in this final section I will also make considerable use of commentaries from two different authors: Clement Greenberg and Jean Baudrillard.

The Quotidian Culture Industry

One of the most penetrating critiques of consumerism can be found in the fourth chapter of Horkheimer and Adorno’s book *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. This chapter – titled ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’ – has been enormously influential amongst a variety of academic disciplines.⁷ The key concept is to the left of the colon in the chapter title: the culture industry.⁸ While both Horkheimer and Adorno share equal credit for developing this concept, it is Adorno who did the most of out of the two to develop this concept and it is he who has utilized it

⁷ A simple way to see this influence is by looking at its inclusion as a key concept and/or text in academic anthologies. Both the original chapter from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Adorno’s follow-up essay ‘The Culture Industry Reconsidered’ can be found in readers for various disciplines. For example, for the original essay see Simon During’s, ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader* (2nd edition), 31-41; Joanne Hollows, Peter Hutchings and Mark Jancovich’s (eds.) *The Film Studies Reader*, 7-11; Craig Calhoun and Joseph Gerteis, eds. *Classical Sociological Theory*, 385-389; Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan’s, eds. *Literary Theory: an Anthology* (2nd edition), 1242-1246. For Adorno’s reconsideration of the concept, see Malcolm Miles, Tim Hall, Iain Borden’s, eds. *The City Cultures Reader* (2nd edition), 163-168; Paul Marris and Sue Thornham’s, eds. *Media Studies: a Reader* (2nd edition), 31-37; Raiford Guins and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz’s, eds. *Popular Culture: a Reader*, 103-108. Simply having an essay in a reader may indeed denote the influence of a text, but it does not necessarily affirm its contemporary relevance. For example, in Simon During’s introductory commentary for the Culture Industry essay in his *Cultural Studies Reader*, he argues that the essay is mostly of historical interest for the field of cultural studies. During claims that much has changed in popular culture since the 1940s (when the original essay was written), and unlike the unilateral, top-down consumption of that time period, today’s consumers have “opportunities for all kinds of individual and collective creativity and decoding,” 32.

⁸ Adorno has noted that in the drafts of this essay he and Horkheimer originally utilized the term ‘mass culture’, which was later replaced by the ‘culture industry’. In “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” In *The Culture Industry*, 98. It should be noted that Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry, as well as the entire Frankfurt School (Critical Theory), has been seen as an elitist theory by some commentators. Adorno, in particular, has been characterized as an intellectual mandarin that looks down upon the masses. As Adorno was a Marxist, his elitism, then, has been referred to as ‘left-wing elitism’. For a critique of what has been referred to as Adorno’s elitism (as well as that of Herbert Marcuse), see Bruce Baugh, “Left-Wing Elitism: Adorno on Popular Culture,” *Philosophy and Literature* 14(1), (1990), 65-78. The charge of elitism can even be found amongst Critical Theory scholars, as Stephen Eric Brunner writes point blankly that “The Frankfurt School was elitist in its view of public life.” *Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 82.

the most throughout his vast body of work.⁹ As a concept, then, the culture industry is a major fixture of Adorno's thought. From its initial usage in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in the 1940s, Adorno continued to employ it up until and including his last lecture series – *Introduction to Sociology* – given in 1968.¹⁰

A lot has changed in the last seventy or so years since Horkheimer and Adorno first constructed their foundational text of the Frankfurt School and their Critical Theory. It is important to ask, then, whether the 'culture industry' is still relevant as a concept today. For the present purposes I take the general framework set out by Horkheimer and Adorno to be highly relevant to the contemporary situation. Ben Highmore shares this view of their present-day relevance. In his book *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*, Highmore claims that "today it requires a substantial amount of effort to *avoid* the products of the culture industry."¹¹ If anything, then, the culture industry, as a conceptual tool for analysis of contemporary society, is more relevant today than it was in Horkheimer and Adorno's time. Highmore notes that a century ago the culture industry's products were predominantly located in the central location of a city. These products were not exclusive to the city, but were much easier to obtain in that particular space than elsewhere. However, with the proper amount of money, time, and effort, many of the products could be acquired by those who resided outside of the city's limits. With the seemingly perpetual expansion of the urban fabric, the availability of these products has steadily increased over the course of time around the world.

⁹ For this reason, I will primarily draw upon Adorno's sole-authored work below.

¹⁰ See Adorno's *Introduction to Sociology*, 57; 69; 85; 87; 89; 152; 153.

¹¹ Ben Highmore, *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*, 115. Further to Highmore's point on the contemporary relevance of the culture industry as a concept, see the collection of essays published in 2010 under the title *The Culture Industry Today*, edited by Fabio Akcelrud Durão. It seems as though the culture industry as a theoretical tool for analyzing contemporary society is either largely embraced (Highmore), or is relegated to the dustbin of historical interest (See During commentary in footnote above), if it is accepted at all.

In his book *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, which he penned in 1967, Lefebvre discusses the various labels that were fashionable for contemporary society (after World War II) such as industrial society, technological society, affluent society, society of leisure, and consumer society.¹² Not satisfied with the definitions promoted by others, Lefebvre sought a term that could convey its “distinctive features” and thus proposed the ‘bureaucratic society of controlled consumption’¹³ as the most accurate concept for capturing the essence of society. Lefebvre elaborates the components of this term as follows: “Whereby this society’s rational character is defined as well as the limits set to its rationality (bureaucratic), the object of its organization (consumption instead of production) and the *level* at which it operates and upon which it is based: everyday life.”¹⁴ Lefebvre believes that along with most other things, “‘culture’ is an item of consumption in this society.”¹⁵ In fact, above all else, what is consumed is culture. You can buy culture(s) several times over. It is here that a link can be made between Lefebvre’s work and the Frankfurt School in general, but specifically Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s concept of the ‘culture industry’. This is despite the fact that Horkheimer and Adorno’s work pre-dates the Second World War. On the surface, Lefebvre’s concept of a ‘bureaucratic society of controlled consumption’ is reminiscent of Adorno’s essay ‘Culture and Administration’, which begins with the assertion that “whoever speaks of culture speaks of administration as well, whether this is his intention

¹² ELMW, 45-60. He conducts a similar inventory at the end of SM, 192-197.

¹³ ELMW, 60.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 108. This consumption of culture is directly related to boredom for Lefebvre, who writes that “[s]atiety and a stubborn quest for satisfaction, dissatisfaction and unrest contradict, confront and reflect each other as they merge; show-consuming turns into a show consuming, and the past – works of art, styles, historic cities – is avidly consumed till boredom and satiety set in.” Ibid., 85.

or not.”¹⁶ While Lefebvre’s term is not as compact as Adorno’s essay title, it carries with it a remarkably similar analysis of contemporary society. Where Adorno and Lefebvre come closest, however, is their shared belief in the significance of consumption in contemporary society without excluding its production side. The twin aspects of consumption of culture (consumer) and production by industry (producer) are best encapsulated by Horkheimer and Adorno’s concept of the culture industry as the two words ‘culture’ and ‘industry’ speak to both sides. Further, the proliferation of mass culture is another example of the Lefebvre’s ‘double process’ for its extension of an industrial process through the urban fabric.

Picking up a thread from previous chapters, most notably the second chapter, there is a style, or, as Lefebvre would call it, an absence of style at work with consumption. The style of the culture industry is a “neon-lit style” which “covers the world.”¹⁷ To Horkheimer and Adorno, “the style of the culture industry, which has no resistant material to overcome, is at the same time the negation of style.”¹⁸ The production of style, then, for the culture industry, creates a void. This void is promoted worldwide as “the whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry.”¹⁹ What once passed for culture has become “neutralized and ready-made” leaving it “worthless.”²⁰ It seems as though, as Lefebvre puts it, “we are surrounded by emptiness, but it is an emptiness filled with signs!”²¹ This emptiness is undoubtedly a reference to boredom. How does the emptiness surrounding us cause the emptiness within us? Are

¹⁶ Theodor Adorno, “Culture and Administration,” In *The Culture Industry*, 107.

¹⁷ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 94.

¹⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 102.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, 34.

²¹ ELMW, 135.

we in fact surrounded by emptiness? Does being left empty cause the creation of the emptiness surrounding us? How does this emptiness affect everyday life?

The ability to get away from one's routine(s), or "flight from the everyday world," is a promise of the culture industry.²² Here, another commonality emerges between the works of Lefebvre and Adorno. Perhaps noticing the parallels between his work and theirs, in the third volume of his *Critique* – first published in the original French in 1981 – Lefebvre adopts Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of the 'culture industry'.²³ However, the parallels predate Lefebvre's acknowledgement of Horkheimer and Adorno, as they are also evident in the second volume of his *Critique*, where Lefebvre wrote that "The consumer does not desire. He submits."²⁴ This passage reveals both the forcefulness of the culture industry, as well as the consumer's willingness to participate in it. Part of the consumer's willingness to 'submit' means that he or she could have chosen otherwise.²⁵ The other side is, of course, the intense pressure from the plethora of mechanisms and mediums at work in the production of culture. In the third volume of his *Critique* Lefebvre explains that

[u]sers become mere receptacles of 'culture' – that is to say, a mixture of ideology, representations and positive knowledge. The enormous culture industry supplies specific products, commodities to which users have a 'right', so that the output of this industrial sector no longer has the appearance of commodities but, rather, of objects valorized by them and destined exclusively for use. Like information! This is the consummation of the world of commodities, without

²² Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 113.

²³ A year earlier in 1980, Lefebvre argued that the Frankfurt School only "timidly saw" the extent of the culture industry. SSW, 218. To Lefebvre, then, the culture industry was/is much larger and widespread than during the time period of the 1940s when Horkheimer and Adorno were first formulating this concept. Lefebvre's comment appears to be a criticism of the scope of the culture industry as a concept, despite implicitly endorsing it in the third volume of his *Critique*.

²⁴ CEL 2, 10.

²⁵ With regards to consumers and their ability to choose, Lefebvre acknowledges that "[a]lthough they are manipulated, they still have a small margin of freedom: they will choose." CEL 3, 72.

objects and products being reduced exclusively to the function of signs and props of what is exchangeable. Use becomes mystificatory.²⁶

How does the concept of the culture industry inform an analysis of boredom?

There is only one mention of boredom in the ‘Culture Industry’ essay, but it is a significant one. The passage which features the comment on boredom serves multiple purposes for the present discussion. It not only demonstrates a parallel with Lefebvre’s work, but it provides valuable insight into both the ‘need’ for a continuous production of items for consumption, as well as the parallel ‘need’ of consumers to seek out something ‘new’ after tarrying with the same product for awhile.²⁷ In addition, somewhat paradoxically, it also explains why the culture industry continues to produce ‘sameness’. If there is one key facet of the culture industry that facilitates boredom, it is the production and reproduction of the same thing. This is made explicit by Horkheimer and Adorno when they claim that “culture today is infecting everything with sameness.”²⁸ As for the mention of boredom, Horkheimer and Adorno write:

Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again. At the same time, however, mechanization has such power of leisure and its happiness, determines so thoroughly the fabrication of entertainment commodities, that the off-duty worker can experience nothing but after-images of the work process itself. The ostensible content is merely a faded foreground; what is imprinted is the automated sequence of standardized tasks. The only escape from the work process in factory and office is through adaptation to it in leisure time. This is the incurable sickness of all entertainment. Amusement congeals into *boredom*, since, to be amusement, it must cost no effort and therefore moves strictly along the well-worn grooves of association. The spectator must need no thoughts of his own: the product prescribes each reaction,

²⁶ CEL 3, 80.

²⁷ To Lefebvre, what is sought amongst consumers is ‘new’ insofar “as its newness is not intolerably new.” IM, 204. This highlights a contradictory element of modernity where stability and change confront one another.

²⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94.

not through any actual coherence – which collapses once exposed to thought – but through signals.²⁹

This is reminiscent of a few passages from Lefebvre's work than have been discussed already. The functionalist system of 'signals' Lefebvre identified in his study of the new town of Mourenx, for example, mentioned in the last section of the third chapter. More importantly, however, is the dialectic of boredom and interest Lefebvre identified in his book *Introduction to Modernity*, which was mentioned at the end of the first chapter.

Amusement³⁰ and interest, however, are not the same things. Amusements may be interesting, but what is interesting is not always amusing. In addition, what is found to be either interesting or amusing one day is most likely a slight variation of a previously successful amusement or interesting thing. As Lefebvre argues, what is deemed as 'new' is oftentimes a variation of the old.

The allegedly new is often only a revival that is unconscious of the fact. Sometimes people also wittingly revive religious, metaphysical and political themes, renovated like old palaces in historic cities: the new tacked on to the old. Some terminological innovations are enough to produce this effect. Fashion and culture have also become mixed up to the point of merging – an old phenomenon, but one that is increasing in scale. Anything that amounts to fashion is regarded as new. Clever advertising makes the neo contain the archaeo, and vice versa. Presentation and verbal packaging conceal the persistence and deterioration of the old in the allegedly new; they also conceal the fact that such exaltation of the archaeo prevents the birth of what could spring from the genuinely new. By definition, fashion, even when it results from a cycle (the periodic return of forms), always passes for new. Otherwise, there would be no fashion! The cycle involves obliviousness of its own moments.³¹

This passage is an extension of the culture industry thesis. That is, it articulates the general logic at work in the contemporary world of consumption. The persistence of the new is the persistence of the old. That is, although what is bought and sold is the idea of

²⁹ Ibid., 109. (my italics).

³⁰ Whereas Bertrand Russell, mentioned in the first chapter, argues that amusement(s) forestalls boredom, Adorno and Lefebvre see a dialectical relationship between boredom and amusement.

³¹ CEL 3, 40-41.

a type of teleological progress towards a newer and newer world of objects, there is relatively little that is innovative. There is no avant-garde to the culture industry because these terms are antithetical to one another. What is portrayed as avant-garde in the culture industry is not worthy of the name.

If there is a counterbalance, or “adversary,” of the culture industry it is “avant-garde art.”³² This is an important distinction, but one that can be blurred. In the last section of this chapter, I will show how the culture industry has integrated avant-garde art (though Adorno would surely disagree). To Horkheimer and Adorno, the banality of everyday life is blurred with the excitement of film and television. They write: “The familiar experience of the moviegoers, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production.”³³ Similarly, in the third and final installment of their postmodern trilogy, Best and Kellner argue that “for many, the world of media fantasies and soap operas is more real than everyday life.”³⁴ These imaginary worlds are more real than real for some. Whether they resemble anything remotely similar to an empirical example from their own actual everyday life is fairly inconsequential. Movies and television programs offer entertainment that is so improbable that some individuals cannot help but become entranced by it. Living vicariously through the lives of the actors on screen becomes a way to escape from one’s everyday life, one that is utterly unsatisfactory. This often results in the use of

³² Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 101. As for the historical presence of the avant-garde, Lefebvre believed “In the thirty years between 1930 and 1960, the avant-garde virtually disappeared.” IM, 343.

³³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 99. Writing to a perceived European audience, Baudrillard has a similar observation about America: “In America cinema is true because it is the whole of space, the whole way of life that are cinematic. The break between the two, the abstraction which we deplore, does not exist: life is cinema.” *America*, 101.

³⁴ Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure*, 74.

imagination for imaginary things and a concurrent “withering of imagination”³⁵ for creating real things. This is part of a process of ‘running away’ from reality.

In his reflections on his ‘damaged life’ found in his book *Minima Moralia*, Adorno further reflects on the boredom facilitated by the culture industry. Here, Adorno writes: “The boredom that people are running away from merely mirrors the process of running away, that started long before. For this reason alone the monstrous machinery of amusement keeps alive and constantly grows bigger without a single person being amused by it.”³⁶ Adorno portrays the culture industry as an endless spiral of entertainment that is inevitably met with boredom, which then leads one to seek out other entertainment, which, again, leads one to be bored, and so on ad infinitum. In his collaborative work with Hans Eisler, Adorno argues for the possibility of objective boredom. That is, they claim that “it should be noted that today almost every product of the culture industry is objectively boring, but that the psycho-technique of the studios deprives the consumers of the awareness of the boredom they experience.”³⁷

Consumers, then, are bored, but they are unaware of their boredom. This is where boredom can be connected with ideology in the traditional Marxist sense of the term: people are unaware of it, but they continue to feed into it and are fed into it.³⁸ This is facilitated by the culture industry’s insistence that their commodities will remedy boredom while neglecting to acknowledge that they also instill boredom in their

³⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 100.

³⁶ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 139.

³⁷ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for Films*, (London: Continuum, 2007), 84.

³⁸ This deserves some clarification, as Lefebvre has pointed out, “[t]here is nothing more difficult to define than ideology.” ME, 26. Slavoj Žižek argues that “The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s *Capital*: ‘Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es’ – ‘they do not know it, but they are doing it.’” *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Press, 1989), 28. In an English translation of the first volume of Marx’s *Capital* this passage is translated as: “They do this without being aware of it,” 166-167.

consumers. Similar to his fellow Frankfurt School member, Erich Fromm, referring to the “general boredom and lack of joy” in society, writes:

Most people are bored because they are not interested in what they are doing, and our industrial system is not interested in having them be interested in their work. The hope for more amusement (than the older generation had) is supposed to be the only incentive that is necessary to compensate them for their boring work. But their leisure time and amusement time, however, is boring. It is just as much managed by the amusement industry as working time is managed by the industrial plant. People look for pleasure and excitement, instead of joy; for power and property instead of growth. They want to *have* much, and *use* much, instead of *being* much.³⁹

This pursuit of happiness inevitably falls short because, as Fromm writes: “All our amusements serve the purpose of making it easy for him to run away from himself and from the threatening boredom by taking refuge in the many ways of escape which our culture offers him; yet covering up a symptom does not do away with the conditions which produce it.”⁴⁰ It would appear as though in the case of the culture industry the title to Claudia Schafer’s book *Bored to Distraction*⁴¹ can be flipped to ‘distracted to boredom’ and then flipped again in an endless loop. Lefebvre expands on this process as follows:

Someone comes up with a certain subject; it’s popular; it’s successful. Writers and producers fall over each other to use it. Audiences flock to see the films and plays which use it, people listen to the radio and watch television whenever there are programmes about it. Then, on the production side, the subject is finally milked dry. As for the public, it gradually tires of it. Interest wanes; the subject becomes a bore. It is discarded. Time goes by, and it is relegated to the past. Bit by bit it is forgotten; but on the other hand, there are newcomers: young people, new listeners, a new audience. The moment comes when the subject can be resuscitated. Someone does just that. It seems new. And the process starts all over again. All that is needed are a few novel touches, or a technical back-up, and people can be relied upon to find it interesting.⁴²

³⁹ Erich Fromm, *On Being Human*, ed. Rainer Funk (New York: Continuum, 1994), 40.

⁴⁰ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 203.

⁴¹ See Claudia Schafer, *Bored to Distraction: Cinema of Excess in End-of-the-Century Mexico and Spain* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

⁴² IM, 163.

To conclude this section, I should say that while the products of the culture industry generally promote an image of happiness, there are a small number of works that actually utilize boredom as an important topic or even as a major focal point. The examples (though not all could be considered as part of the culture industry) stem from multiple forms of media, such as a graphic novel that shares its name with its protagonist *David Boring*;⁴³ Walter Sickert's Impressionist painting 'Ennui'; a French film titled 'Ennui' adapted from Alberto Moravia's novel *La Noia (Boredom)*;⁴⁴ an HBO television series called 'Bored to Death' based on the short story with the same title by Jonathan Ames;⁴⁵ a Japanese punk band goes by the name 'Boredoms', and the English punk band the Buzzcocks have a song called 'Boredom'. These are the obvious examples as the emphasis on boredom is made explicit in the titles. The difficulty is finding examples that are not explicitly labeled.

A not so obvious example can be found in Todd Solondz's dark comedy film from 1998 simply called 'Happiness'.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note this dialectical reversal where an ideal example of boredom is found in a movie called 'Happiness'. In the

⁴³ Daniel Clowes, *David Boring* (New York: Pantheon, 2000). In 1994, the author of this graphic novel also released a board game called 'Boredom: The Dismal Anti-Game for 1 to 3 Players'. The game is described on the box as "a game that explores the mind-numbing sameness of daily existence in modern urban America." The chief objective of the game is to either commit suicide before the other players, or be the last player left alive. As the instructions put it, "The last player left after the others have committed suicide wins or loses, depending on your perspective."

⁴⁴ Alberto Moravia has referred to boredom as a muse of sorts. He explains: "Boredom has been my great inspirer. At a certain point, certain subjects, certain ways of dealing with them, inspired in me an intolerable boredom, and so I then tried to change them." Alberto Moravia and Alain Elkann, *Life of Moravia*, trans. William Weaver (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2000), 279.

⁴⁵ For the source material of this television show, see Jonathan Ames, "Bored to Death," *McSweeney's* 24 (2007): 37-66. This short story is a detective-noir piece, which begins with the following sentence: "The trouble happened because I was bored," 37.

⁴⁶ Incidentally, artwork for the movie's poster and DVD/VHS covers was provided by Daniel Clowes, the author of the previously mentioned graphic novel *David Boring*.

movie, Phillip Seymour Hoffman's character Allen is talking with his psychotherapist⁴⁷ Dr. Bill Maplewood (played by Dylan Baker) regarding his inability to garner even the absolute minimum amount of courage in order to request a date with a female neighbour of his. The key scene is set in the psychotherapist's office and begins with Allen's monologue describing his problem:

What can I talk about? I have nothing to talk about. I'm boring. I know, I've been told before, so don't tell me it's not true, cause it's a fact. I bore people. People look at me and they get bored. People listen to me and they zone out. Bored. 'Who is that boring person?' they think. I've never before met anyone so boring. For her to see how boring I am...

At this point in the film the audio shifts from Allen's outwardly spoken monologue to the therapist's internal monologue.

A gallon of skim milk, a dozen eggs, one of those disposable cameras...

Despite the concerned look on the therapist's face, he is entirely disengaged from his patient's problem. Instead of attentively listening, as was the purpose of the session, he is constructing a grocery and errands list. Behind the appearance of professionalism, the experience of boredom is being concealed.⁴⁸

Culture Industry Sound: Popular Music

In the boredom literature, Lars Svendsen is somewhat unique in his discussion of music in his book *A Philosophy of Boredom*. In particular, Svendsen has noted that popular music has the ability to negate boredom in everyday life. By entertaining its

⁴⁷ For more on the dynamic between patient and psychotherapist that pertains to boredom, see E. Mark Stern, ed. *Psychotherapy and the Boredom Patient* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁴⁸ Writing in 1967, Raoul Vaneigem of the Situationists International noticed a trend in the simultaneous disappearance and emergence of happiness in cultural artifacts. "The face of happiness vanished from art and literature," Vaneigem contends, "as it began to be reproduced along endless walls and billboards, offering to each passerby the universal image in which to recognize himself." *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, 67. Vaneigem is arguing that happiness is both everywhere and nowhere. Similar to the scene from the movie 'Happiness', boredom is often waiting behind the appearance of happiness. What is so often presented as a remedy for boredom also instills it.

listeners, popular music eliminates or at the very least severely diminishes one's experience of boredom. Implicit in Svendsen, then, is a conceptual triad consisting of everyday life, boredom, and popular music. Svendsen does not acknowledge the dialectical relationship between these three elements. He, instead, sees a fairly rigid causal chain. Svendsen argues that

[p]op music is based on the banalities of everyday life, and it attempts to convert these banalities in such a way that they make a break possible with everyday boredom. In pop music a hope is formulated that these banalities can become something more...As long as the music lasts, we escape boredom, but, sooner or later, the music will stop.⁴⁹

This is a suspension of one's boredom. In his argument, Svendsen, in a similar manner as Adorno, establishes pop music as a form of distraction that temporarily alleviates the experience of boredom. However, Adorno sees the dialectical relationship between boredom and amusements. Adorno writes:

Once men have remedies, however poor, against boredom, they are no longer willing to put up with boredom; this contributes to the mass base of musical consumption. It demonstrates a disproportion between condition and potential, between the boredom to which men still are prey and the possible, if unsuccessful, arrangement of life in which boredom would vanish.⁵⁰

With this, the difference between Svendsen and Adorno emerges. For Svendsen, it would seem as though one could stave off boredom as long as they had something like an iPod attached to one's ears with a continuous loop of songs playing. While this is a valuable insight, what is missing in this analysis is the possibility of pop music itself being boring. For this, Adorno's work is an important source.

One of the most explicit examples of the culture industry's tendency to have 'amusements congeal into boredom' is that of popular music. All forms of music, but

⁴⁹ Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 140.

⁵⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 48.

especially popular music, constitute significant elements in the fabric of everyday life in modernity. After all, what does not pass for music? Where do sounds begin and music end? These questions are difficult to answer considering that there is a blurring between music and non-music in modernity. It is not surprising, then, that Lefebvre structured his *Introduction to Modernity* with twelve preludes in lieu of chapters. The twelve preludes are meant to correspond to the twelve notes found in a chromatic music scale. To Lefebvre, music is a key cultural element in any study of modernity simply because it is virtually everywhere in the modern world. Lefebvre argues that “a popular song is part of the dimension of the everyday.”⁵¹ Similarly, Adorno has noted that “[m]usic is no longer exceptional, as at feudal and absolutist festivities and in the bourgeois concert; rather, it has achieved an ubiquity that makes it part of everyday life.”⁵² This ubiquity of music is the ubiquity of distraction. Regardless of the quality of the music itself, its use in the background in spaces of consumption relegates it to the periphery of everyday life. It is central to everyday life as a ubiquitous presence, but its importance as a serious art form is pushed to the margins of the everyday. Adorno elaborates on this in his unfinished book *Aesthetic Theory*:

Music, whether it is played in a café or, as is often the case in America, piped into restaurants, can be transformed into something completely different, of which the hum of conversation and the rattle of dishes and whatever else becomes a part. To fulfill its function, this music presupposes distracted listeners no less than in its autonomous state it expects attentiveness. A medley is sometimes made up of parts of artworks, but through this montage the parts are fundamentally transformed. Functions such as warming people up and drowning out silence recasts music as something defined as mood, the commodified negation of the boredom produced by the grey-on-grey commodity world.⁵³

⁵¹ CEL 2, 175.

⁵² Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 129.

⁵³ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 253.

Indeed, the distraction of music can be found in numerous areas of everyday life such as in the streets, in taxis, in elevators, etc. Similar to Svendsen, Lefebvre has argued that music can “bring compensation for the miseries of everydayness, for its deficiencies and failures.”⁵⁴ However, Lefebvre acknowledges the dialectical character of music much the same as Adorno. On the one hand, the proper combination of, to use a Lefebvrian triad, melody-harmony-rhythm⁵⁵ enables one to be pulled out the boredom of everyday life. On the other hand, certain combinations of music can also induce boredom. A third possibility is for music to not simply allow one to escape boredom or be pulled into boredom, but it could create the conditions for realizing the profound boredom throughout society.

To delve further into boredom and music it is important to differentiate between different types. While there are dozens of genres currently available, it will be prudent for the present discussion to articulate two, which can be found in Adorno’s expansive essay ‘On Popular Music’.⁵⁶ According to Adorno, in a general way it is possible to distinguish between two spheres of music: serious and popular. Serious music does not equate to ‘good music’, as serious music can be either good or bad.⁵⁷ As for the basic characteristics of serious music, Adorno argues that “[e]very detail derives its musical sense from the concrete totality of the piece which, in turn, consists of the life

⁵⁴ RH, 66.

⁵⁵ See Ibid., 12; PS, 370. Lefebvre argues this triad “does not lack interest.” RH, 66.

⁵⁶ This essay is an ideal example of the culture industry applied to a particular medium. Indeed, John Storey astutely argues that this particular essay “is a representative example of the Frankfurt School approach to popular culture.” ‘Marxism: Introduction’, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: a Reader*, 56. It should be mentioned that I am not concerned with Adorno’s infamous critique of ‘Jazz’, but am instead concerned with popular music in general. For an examination of jazz and boredom, see Ted Gioia, “Boredom and Jazz,” In *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 108-126.

⁵⁷ Theodor Adorno, “On Popular Music,” In *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert and trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 441.

relationship of the details and never of a mere enforcement of a musical scheme.”⁵⁸ In contrast to the acute attention to detail found in serious music, Adorno claims that the “fundamental characteristic of popular music” is what he calls “standardization.”⁵⁹ To be popular, then, songs need to conform to a fairly rigid song structure, lyric content, and length/duration. There is a slavish attention to detail, but one that stifles creativity. Whereas the intricacies of serious music are all part of a creative totality, the totality of popular music is a retread devoid of the same emphasis on pure creativity. When followed, Adorno argues that this standardization “guarantees that regardless of what aberrations occur, the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced.”⁶⁰ This is not to say that there is no flexibility with the songs. In fact, Adorno argues that “every detail is substitutable; it serves its function only as a cog in a machine.”⁶¹ The machine of modernity in its capitalist guise is the driving force behind this standardization.

In contrast to serious music, Adorno claims that popular music promotes both “distraction and inattention.”⁶² Popular music songs not only distract from important, worldly issues, they also distract a listener from seeking out other music, and they distract the listener from their own thoughts and individuality. This is a relatively new phenomenon, specific to the industrialized and urbanized society of modernity. Adorno writes:

Distraction is bound to the present mode of production, to the rationalized and mechanized process of labor to which, directly or indirectly, masses are subject. This mode of production, which engenders fears and anxiety about

⁵⁸ Ibid., 439.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 437-438.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 438.

⁶¹ Ibid., 440.

⁶² Ibid., 458

unemployment, loss of income, war, has its 'non-productive' correlate in entertainment; that is, relaxation which does not involve the effort of concentration at all. People want to have fun. A fully concentrated and conscious experience of art is possible only to those whose lives do not put such a strain on them that in their spare time they want relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously. The whole sphere of cheap commercial entertainment reflects this dual desire. It induces relaxation because it is patterned and pre-digested. Its being patterned and pre-digested serves within the psychological household of the masses to spare them the effort of that participation (even in listening or observation) without which there can be no receptivity to art. On the other hand, the stimuli they provide permit an escape from the boredom of mechanized labor.⁶³

On the next page in the same text, Adorno expands on this thought:

To escape boredom and avoid effort are incompatible – hence the reproduction of the very attitude from which escape is sought. To be sure, the way in which they must work on the assembly line, in the factory, or at office machines denies people any novelty. They seek novelty, but the strain and boredom associated with actual work leads to avoidance of effort in that leisure-time which offers the only chance for really new experience. As a substitute, they crave a stimulant. Popular music comes to offer it. Its stimulations are met with the inability to vest effort in the ever-identical. This means boredom again. It is a circle which makes escape impossible. The impossibility of escape causes the widespread attitude of inattention toward popular music. The moment of recognition is that of effortless sensation. The sudden attention attached to this moment burns itself out *instanter* and relegates the listener to a realm of inattention and distraction. On the one hand, the domain of production and plugging presupposes distraction and, on the other, produces it.⁶⁴

Here, Adorno identifies the dialectic of mass culture that Lefebvre identified in his work. That is, the unity in the opposition between boredom and interest as a defining feature of modernity. There is also a shared identification of the utopian element in the experience of boredom: the wish for something else. This something else is rarely viewed as one that necessitates a radical transformation of everyday life, but it is the foundation for such a view. Instead of dealing with it as a complex and difficult problem of modern life, a

⁶³ Ibid., 458.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 459.

quick fix is sought. Adorno's characterization of popular music as a 'stimulant' that is 'crave(d)' is fairly similar to the actions of drug addicts with their drugs.

Similar to a drug, or as Orrin E. Klapp would call it, though not very accurately, a 'social placebo',⁶⁵ popular music provides temporary relief without actually solving the problem. That is, the problem of a style of life that is endlessly creative; a style of life that is a work of art in the Lefebvrian sense of the term. While popular music is part of the problem of the persistent boredom experienced in everyday life, the solution, at least for Adorno, is nevertheless music. He explains that

[i]n the first place, as a temporal art, music is dynamic in terms of its own material conditions: just as time is irreversible, so all music balks at a manipulation of time that implies its indifference to it. A meaningful musical organization is necessarily one in which meaning and time sequence relate to each other, so that the passage of time proves to be more meaningful rather than more arbitrary vis-à-vis the concrete musical content. Thanks to its integration, great music will undoubtedly deal with the passage of time by making it shorter. Its ability to drive out boredom has, like entire heteronomous musical categories, become an element of the music itself and of its autonomous status. The great, classical symphonic movements of Beethoven, the first movement of the *Eroica* or of the Seventh, can be heard ideally as if they lasted only a moment.⁶⁶

'Great music' in Adorno's theory is the key model for a work of art similar to that expressed in Lefebvre's critique of everyday life. Music that drives out boredom is one that lasts a moment. This particular term (moment) demonstrates an affinity between with the works of Adorno and Lefebvre.

At the end of volume two of Lefebvre's *Critique* there is a theory of moments that parallels Adorno's usage of the term.⁶⁷ Lefebvre's work, then, is a 'key' that helps open

⁶⁵ The final chapter in Klapp's book focuses on what he calls 'social placebos'. He defines these as those items which "relieve tensions such as boredom," although "they do not remedy sources of tension but merely make people feel better about an unsatisfactory state of affairs." *Overload and Boredom*, 131.

⁶⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 190.

⁶⁷ See CEL 2, 340-358.

the door on Adorno's work here, and vice versa, as opposed to the circumstances Adorno has described where the "key indeed goes in, but the door doesn't open."⁶⁸ To open the door on Adorno's emphasis on a musical 'moment', a basic definition of Lefebvre's concept of moments is important. For Lefebvre, moments emerge out of the everyday, but they are not part of everydayness.⁶⁹ Lefebvre argues that "[o]nce profundity and beauty are lived (and not simply gazed at or seen as a spectacle) they become moments, combinations which marvelously overturn structures established in the everyday, replacing them by other structures, unforeseen ones, and fully authentic."⁷⁰ A specifically 'authentic' musical moment, for Adorno, can be found, but it must be outside the 'standardized' framework of popular music. To both Lefebvre and Adorno, a specifically 'authentic' life is one that is created outside the same standardization which permeates virtually all sectors of everyday life in modernity.

While Adorno claims that certain texts, images, and/or sounds are inherently boring, he also argues that there are art works that defy boredom such as can be found with the music of Gustav Mahler. Adorno claims that "no one, not even an opponent, has been bored by Mahler."⁷¹ Essentially, one need not enjoy Mahler's music, but one cannot be bored by it. This example is where Adorno's work fails to reflect present-day society, as today this is a rather difficult argument to sustain. Boredom has become much more imbedded in the fabric of everyday life than in the time of Adorno's reflections on the

⁶⁸ Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," 36.

⁶⁹ CEL 2, 351.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 66. Mary McLeod underscores the importance of 'moments' in Lefebvre's project as follows: "Lefebvre envisioned, as he would throughout his life, a future society of abundance, increased leisure, and personal liberty, grounded in everyday desires and needs. The limitless possibilities of this future were already present in everyday life, but only in 'moments'." Mary McLeod, "Henri Lefebvre' Critique of Everyday Life: an Introduction," *Architecture of the Future*, (eds.) Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 16.

⁷¹ Theodor Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 61.

culture industry. Anyone can claim that they are bored by something, but this does not mean that they are actually bored by it. In fact, Lawrence Grossberg has observed “an increasing propensity for youth to describe desires and life-changes in terms of a decrease of boredom rather than an increase of pleasure or excitement.”⁷² It is not whether one likes music or not, it is whether or not it bores. For Grossberg, this is especially evident among younger people. Grossberg explains how

[y]outh lives its postmodern affect between the boredom of terror and the terror of boredom; it is positioned in an ironic play (a celebration of excess?) between the demand/threat of subjectification (boredom) and of commodification (terror); it exists within the space between the absolute loss of control and the partial recuperation of that mastery at the level of its own imagery and imaginary. Youth avoids both boredom and terror by living them out in the highs and lows of our media culture, which has become a buffer zone between this affective reality and the lack of an ideological description which would enable us to respond to it. Culture has become the paradoxical site at which youth lives out an impossible relation to the future.⁷³

Following Grossberg, young people may very well express themselves in terms of boredom. It is rare, however, for artists to express boredom in their work. Perhaps if life were expressed in artistic terms, there would be a greater emphasis on transforming the everyday into a work of art. The opposite occurs, albeit in among relatively few. That is to say, instead of transforming the boredom of everyday life into art, certain avant-garde artists transform art into the boredom of the everyday. The present discussion will now shift from the culture industry side of music to one group of avant-garde artists who make use of boredom as part of their art.

⁷² Lawrence Grossberg, “Rockin’ with Reagan, or the Mainstreaming of Postmodernity,” *Cultural Critique* 10 (Autumn, 1988), 139. Elsewhere, Grossberg argues that “the most devastating rejection of a particular rock and roll text is to say that it is ‘boring.’” Grossberg, “Another Boring Day in Paradise,” 233.

⁷³ Grossberg, “Rockin’ with Reagan,” 148.

Avant-Garde Sound: Fluxus

In avant-garde music, much the same as it was for architecture mentioned in chapter three, postmodernism has been said to be a response to the dullness of modernism. In the second volume of their postmodern trilogy, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner argue that modernism was displaced by a new form of aesthetics under the broad term postmodernism. Various artistic ventures such as the novels of William S. Burroughs, the music of John Cage, the choreography and dance of Merce Cunningham, the architecture of Robert Venturi, and the overall visual artistry of Andy Warhol are cited approvingly as examples of this postmodernism. “Seen as stale, boring, pretentious, and elitist,” argue Best and Kellner, “European and American high modernism were rejected.”⁷⁴ Susan Sontag argues that the “history of forms is dialectical. As types of sensibility become banal, boring, and are overthrown by their opposites, so forms in art are, periodically, exhausted. They become banal, unstimulating, and are replaced by new forms which are at the same time anti-forms.”⁷⁵ While I would agree with Sontag on this, I argue, following Lefebvre, that this dialectical process of form/anti-form is slightly more complex. What is exhausted is not swallowed by the process, but is relegated to the sidelines of fashion, only to be reinstated after a certain period of time.

Dick Higgins argues that “[b]oredom was, until recently, one of the qualities an artist tried to avoid. Yet today it appears that artists are deliberately trying to make their work boring.”⁷⁶ Higgins, a composer, is an important source here as he was part of the Fluxus movement, of which John Cage was a central member. The Fluxus movement

⁷⁴ Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, 124.

⁷⁵ Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 180.

⁷⁶ Dick Higgins, “Boredom and Danger,” *Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Critical Anthology of the New Music*, ed. Battcock Gregory (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), 20-21.

created works of art that defy the conventional relationship of performers/participants and listeners/viewers because there are “no passive spectators, only participants.”⁷⁷ The spectators, then, are also participants. Interestingly enough, what Higgins advocates is a participation in boredom. Higgins is effectively emphasizing and promoting an embrace of the boring. This is odd since, as Michael Raposa notes, when a work of art in any form is perceived as boring it is usually “considered to be a failure.”⁷⁸ If Higgins truly is advocating an embrace of the boring, would it not follow that, contra Best and Kellner, high modernism is what he and his fellow Fluxus member John Cage are striving for, and not postmodernism? That is, at least, the ‘stale and boring’ aspects of it.

As an artistic movement, Fluxus has Surrealism and Dada as its major predecessors.⁷⁹ One of Dada’s most influential members, Marcel Duchamp, has remarked on the relationship between boredom and the artistic Fluxus practice of ‘happenings’ as follows: “Happenings have introduced into art an element no one had put there: boredom. To do a thing in order to bore people is something I never imagined! And that’s too bad, because it’s a beautiful idea. Fundamentally, it’s the same idea as John Cage’s silence in music; no one had thought of that.”⁸⁰

According to Higgins, John Cage was the first to incorporate both boredom and intensity into serious art, as opposed to favouring one element over the other. According

⁷⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁸ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 50.

⁷⁹ For a discussion of the connections between Fluxus, Dada, and Surrealism, as well as the importance of boredom in the respective movements, see Dorothee Brill’s book *Shock and the Senseless in Dada and Fluxus*, especially the subsection ‘Shock and Boredom: Fluxus’s ‘Senseless Perception’, 138-149. For general discussions of Dada and Surrealism and their complex relationships with everyday life, see the second chapter in Michael Gardiner’s *Critiques of Everyday Life*, 24-42 and the fourth chapter in Ben Highmore’s *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 45-59. For an analysis of Lefebvre and surrealism, see Sara Nadal-Melsió, “Lessons in Surrealism: Relationality, event, encounter,” In *Space, Difference, Everyday Life; Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds. Kanishka Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 161-175.

⁸⁰ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: De Capo Press, 1987), 99.

to Higgins, the two elements were intertwined in his work as “Cage was the first to try to emphasize in his work and his teaching a dialectic between boredom and intensity.”⁸¹ A musical composition by Cage such as *4'33"* is one such example of this dialectic. As difficult as it can be to put music into words, it is appropriate here as this particular piece of ‘music’ does not contain one single note. That is, at least not from any musicians in the traditional sense of those with instruments. Instead, it is four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence ‘performed’ in front of an audience. The performance begins when an individual sits down behind a piano and closes the fallboard, which covers the piano keys. The ‘music’ or ambient sounds come from the audience and surrounding environment. It is music without music.⁸² Everything within earshot becomes part of the performance. A squeak of a chair here, a cough and a sneeze over there, the ‘silence’ actually contains a plethora of sounds which should vary with each performance.⁸³ Even if a chair squeaks and a few people sneeze and/or cough the same amount, it would certainly be impossible for them to spontaneously occur at the same moment in each performance.

As for Higgins’s description of the dialectic of intensity and boredom, what is intense about the lack of music? Is it the expectation of music without hearing it part of this intensity? Watching and/or listening to a performance where there is no performance would seemingly induce boredom. But does it? Higgins notes, “boredom often serves a useful function: as an opposite to excitement and as a means of bringing emphasis to

⁸¹ Dick Higgins, “Boredom and Danger,” 22.

⁸² I am thinking here of a passage from Baudrillard where he writes: “A treatise of monotony – a music which isn’t music, just as monochrome is a colour which isn’t a colour, as monomania is a passion which isn’t a passion.” *Cool Memories II*, 80.

⁸³ In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre, although in reference to places of worship, notes that silence “has its music.” PS, 225.

what it interrupts, causing us to view both elements freshly.”⁸⁴ Is this the message embedded in Cage’s piece *4’33’’*? Higgins writes how “boredom played a comparable role, in relation to intensity, that silence plays with sound, where each one heightens the other and frames it.”⁸⁵ What if Cage’s dialectic of boredom and intensity was an example of the intensity of boredom? If this is the case, Cage’s music served as a window into the alienating effects of the modern world through this dialectic. Whereas popular music offers escapism from this boredom, this type of avant-garde music allows one to confront this boredom by encountering the rhythms of everyday life instead of masking them.

Lefebvre’s final project involved conceiving a new type of scholar, one that was in tune with rhythm. As opposed to psychoanalysis and the psychoanalyst, Lefebvre was constructing the foundations for rhythmanalysis as an interdisciplinary point of departure and the rhythmanalyst as its practitioner. Illustrating a portrait of the ideal rhythmanalyst, Lefebvre states that she or he must not only listen for noises (sounds devoid of meaning), murmurs (sounds full of meaning), but also listen to silences.⁸⁶ Of course, silence is an extraordinarily complex thing. Where does silence begin and noise end? This is the experience one finds with John Cage’s piece *4’33’’*.⁸⁷ If one participates in this piece without forehand knowledge they will be forced to tarry with emptiness, which may be boring for some. For others, it is an opportunity to think through the (im)possibility of silence, which may be a very interesting prospect. Cage, then, can be seen as one of the first practitioners of rhythmanalysis, one of the founders of a yet to be

⁸⁴ Dick Higgins, “Boredom and Danger,” 22.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ RH, 19.

⁸⁷ Cage’s composition, despite from a performer’s perspective consisting of a virtually blank sheet of music, is a remarkably well-planned and, somewhat paradoxically, spontaneous piece of ‘music’. Cage writes: “There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot.” *Silence: Lecture and Writings*, 8.

named practice of listening to the spectrum of sounds. The intensity of boredom reveals itself in his work.

What does Cage have to say on the relationship between art and boredom? To Cage, boredom is something inherent to his creative process. In his appropriately titled book *Silence*, Cage argues that “the way to get ideas is to do something boring. For instance, composing in such a way that the process of composing is boring induces ideas. They fly into one’s head like birds.”⁸⁸ This can be compared with Benjamin’s metaphor for boredom as a dream bird of experience where a rustling in the leaves drives him away. Similarly, a rustling in the leaves would negate Cage’s inspiration by triggering a moment of creativity. Boredom for Cage, then, is essential to his creative process. Cage derives this insight from Buddhist mediation. Cage explains as follows: “In Zen they say: If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and so on. Eventually one discovers that it’s not boring at all but very interesting.”⁸⁹ This is reminiscent of Lefebvre’s assertion that the extraordinary is lurking in the ordinary. The mysteries of the everyday are those items that initially appear commonplace and obvious. In the case of boredom, one must tarry with boring things in order to understand it.

Regarding Cage’s work in particular and the Fluxus movement in general, Higgins asks the rhetorical question: “Boring? Of course; if one were to ignore the more intense activity involved, which we might call “super boring,” and which took one beyond the initial level of simple boredom.”⁹⁰ Here it becomes evident that Higgins identifies the plural forms of boredom instead of just a singular boredom. The pieces that

⁸⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁰ Dick Higgins, “Boredom and Danger,” 23.

are ‘super boring’ in the aesthetic sense used by Higgins are “repetitive pieces.”⁹¹ The repetitions are intense in the same manner as a drop of water from a tap gradually intensifies as the tap degenerates, or the drop of water intensifies as the state of mind of the observer degenerates. The super boring is an overload of sameness where the boring develops intensity as it repeats over and over again. This sameness is different from that of the culture industry since it is transparent with its emphasis on the same, and the expectation of boredom is explicit. The super boring, however, is the everyday become manifest. Is the everyday not the most ‘repetitive piece’ of all? In this light, the super boring is the background of the everyday whereas ‘simple boredom’ is what masks the profundity of modernity’s societal boredom.

To conclude this section, it is worth noting that along with his musical work, Higgins “explored the possibility of projecting a blank film which would be gradually burned by the projector during showing.”⁹² Here the dual elements – dueling elements, even – of boredom and danger are evident. A blank film is a good candidate for inducing boredom. However, the degeneration of the film via burning the cellulose acetate film is an element of danger, especially if the audience is unaware of the planned activities. While planned, they are also spontaneous in two senses. First, the audience is not expecting it and secondly, the planners do not know exactly how this burning will finish. Higgins writes: “the most intense art is necessarily involved with these things, boredom and danger, not as a new mode, but because they are implicit in the new mentality of our time. This mentality is one in which total success is impossible, total victory

⁹¹ Ina Blom, “Boredom and Oblivion,” *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 80.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 83.

inconceivable, and relativism axiomatic.”⁹³ This passage from Higgins’ essay (published in the late 1960s) speaks of a mentality that is prophetic of Jean-François Lyotard’s book from 1979 *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (*The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*), which offers what Lyotard refers to as an entirely simplified definition, of the postmodern condition as “incredulity toward metanarratives.”⁹⁴ In the boredom literature, Patricia Meyer Spacks makes the observation that “[a]s its declared dominion spreads, boredom becomes a metaphor for the postmodern condition.”⁹⁵ It is not exactly clear what Spacks means by this. Is she here referring to Lyotard’s work? It is, after all, Lyotard’s concept. Does this mean that boredom is prevalent in postmodern society, if it can in fact be called that? To Lyotard, the transformation toward a postmodern society began roughly around the end of the 1950s when the “status of knowledge is altered.”⁹⁶ While Lyotard’s argument is an epistemological one, it serves as an important insight into broader cultural transformations. As was discussed in the last chapter, there was an exponential growth of the suburban way of life, especially in America, which entailed an influx of automobiles, televisions, detached housing, etc. One cultural form that ties all of these elements together is advertising.

⁹³ Dick Higgins, “Boredom and Danger,” 27.

⁹⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv. It is worth noting that in his foreword to the English edition of Lyotard’s book, Fredric Jameson makes a passing reference to Lefebvre’s concept of the ‘bureaucratic society of controlled consumption,’ which Jameson notes is one of the many labels given to the contemporary socioeconomic situation. *Ibid.*, vii.

⁹⁵ Spacks, *Boredom*, 260.

⁹⁶ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 3. I here use Lyotard’s work within the context of modernity. Interestingly, Perry Anderson notes “the idea of a ‘postmodernism’ first surfaced in the Hispanic world of the 1930’s, a generation before its appearance in England or America.” *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso Press, 1998), 3-4.

Culture Industry Image: Advertisements

In a short article published in 1962 on the topic of the ‘myths of everyday life’, Lefebvre urges his readers to “think about advertising.”⁹⁷ Lefebvre argues that advertisements are one of the mythical elements of the everyday in that they perpetuate myths throughout the everyday and even about the everyday. Perhaps the most visible and constant representatives of the culture industry, advertisements are vital for its growth and maintenance. So vital, in fact, to its presence in society that Adorno referred to advertising as the culture industry’s “elixir of life.”⁹⁸ Along these lines, and from another text, Adorno once wrote that culture “has assumed the character of advertising.”⁹⁹ These commodified images/images of commodities are, in a way, the poetry of the everyday by way of exclaiming the extraordinary about ordinary things in ordinary settings. Adorno has claimed that the “poetic mystery of the product, in which it is more than itself, consists in the fact that it participates in the infinite nature of production and the reverential awe inspired by objectivity fits in smoothly with the schema of advertising.”¹⁰⁰ This line can be read as the ‘poetic mystery of the product’ is that which is perpetuated by the poetry of advertising.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Lefebvre scholar Kristin Ross

⁹⁷ KW, 103. Elsewhere, he ponders whether advertisers are ‘magicians’ of modernity. He writes: “Is the advertiser the magician of modern times working out spells to entrap and subjugate desire, or is he merely a modest, honest intermediary investigating public requirements and broadcasting the discovery of new, exciting products to be launched shortly on the market in answer to such requirements? No doubt the truth lies between these two extremes.” ELMW, 55. So, to Lefebvre, advertisers are not all scheming opportunists trying to manipulate the public into purchasing their goods and services. No doubt, advertisers are trying to entice consumers, but, according to Lefebvre, it is not necessarily with the goal of ‘entrapping’ them. This is perhaps a point of contention between Lefebvre and Adorno, as Adorno would not be as forgiving of advertisers.

⁹⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 131.

⁹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, 79.

¹⁰⁰ Theodor Adorno, “The Schema of Mass Culture,” In *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1991), 63.

¹⁰¹ It is important to acknowledge the difficulty in linking Adorno with poetry when one considers his famous quip: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” *Prisms*, 34. Later in his career, Adorno became less certain about this, arguing “I do not know whether the principle that no poem can be written

calls advertising “the poetry of modernity,”¹⁰² perhaps alluding to Lefebvre’s broader assertion that “publicity is the poetry of modernity.”¹⁰³ Adorno, Ross, and Lefebvre all share this thread in their analyses of everyday life in the modern world. All three theorists acknowledge that advertisements and the process of advertising are major components to the interrelated elements of consumption, modernity and everyday life.

The widespread flight from boredom is apparent in recent advertisements. The central tendency is for boredom to serve as a foil for the commodity being advertised. The basic formula for these commercials begins with the assumption that boredom is an unwelcome experience that ought to be eliminated from one’s life as soon as possible. This is a generally accepted message, as advertisements are rarely thought to need any explanation regarding their use of boredom.¹⁰⁴ Boredom is simply an obvious experience that all consumers understand. Essentially, it is undesirable and should be avoided at all costs. One could do this, as advertisements are all too ready to demonstrate, by purchasing the product and/or service being advertised and the problem of boredom is solved. As was argued above, consumerism offers only a temporary relief from the boredom of everyday life if it offers any relief at all. One has to continually look for new advertisements for the instructions on how to live one’s life. Of course, not everyone succumbs to the suggestions imparted by these ads. One does not have to believe the advertisements to buy the product. The point being made here is the representation of boredom in advertisements seems to be entirely in the negative all the while exciting

after Auschwitz can be sustained.” Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course, 1965/1966*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 19. Nevertheless, as it concerns advertising, Adorno’s argument applies to advertisements, as they are both poetry and non-poetry. They may tell the tale of modernity, but they are equally ‘barbaric’.

¹⁰² Kristin Ross, “French Quotidian,” *The Everyday*, ed. Stephen Johnstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 45.

¹⁰³ ELMW, 107.

¹⁰⁴ Spacks, *Boredom*, 272.

alternatives are offered for purchase as more than just distractions, but as new ways of living. An important contribution to boredom scholarship would entail an analysis of all of its representation in advertisements. This would be difficult as boredom is both explicit and implicit in these advertisements produced by the culture industry.

At the beginning of her ninth chapter titled ‘Cultural Miasma: Postmodern Enlargements of Boredom’ from her book *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind*, Patricia Meyer Spacks notes that as far as the use of boredom as a conceptual tool in advertisements, advertisers not only utilize it, but “advertisers could hardly do without it.”¹⁰⁵ A few pages later in the same chapter Spacks expands on this thought: “Boredom has become an embracing rubric of discontent. Although those who explain its omnipresence typically attribute it to large cultural causes, advertising thrives on the suggestion that specific remedies will alleviate it.”¹⁰⁶ What remedies would those be? The remedies are the very products that are being advertised. It is not a coincidence that the all-pervasive boredom waiting for any and all consumers as portrayed in these advertisements is also presented as being easily alleviated with the purchase of a specific commodity. For this, spectacular images or slogans are utilized in an effort to sway the consumer. This tactic has a finite quality and quantity of efficacy. Spectacles may divert or capture one’s attention, but they do so for a relatively short period of time. As George Ritzer notes, “spectacles tend to grow dated and boring quickly.”¹⁰⁷ Attracting one’s attention via spectacular advertisements can be effective yet fleeting. As is argued by Mica Nava, “[c]ynicism and boredom about ads are widespread and part of a more

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 249.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 251.

¹⁰⁷ George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2005), 175.

general neurasthenia of postmodern culture. In fact the battle of the advertisers to overcome this boredom is what has led to the creation of so many witty, sophisticated, intertextually referenced and visually appealing ads.”¹⁰⁸ Because of this boredom with advertisements, advertisers have to work hard in order to capture the interest of potential consumers, or retain the attention of their current consumers.

Lefebvre argues that the general tendency of capitalists and their companies in their quest to sell a product is to “endeavour – mainly through advertising – [to] create a need for it.”¹⁰⁹ These are ‘false’ needs generated by what Lefebvre calls “ceaseless intrusions upon our daily experience.”¹¹⁰ They are ‘false’ in that the specific objects for sale are not genuine needs required to sustain one’s life in any way. No one needs *this* particular car, or *that* particular piece of furniture, despite the attempts of various advertisements to portray them otherwise. Lefebvre argues that advertisements “help to proliferate the spread of images, smothering walls and cramming consciousness with stereotyped messages and debased symbols.”¹¹¹

David Ogilvy, the widely acclaimed ‘father of advertising’, incorporated television viewer boredom into his advertising strategies. Ogilvy claimed that the “better the program on which your commercials appear, the fewer sales you make. When viewers are bored by an old movie, they are more likely to pick up the telephone and order your product than when they are riveted by an episode of *Dallas*.”¹¹² The key here, for Ogilvy, is a consumer’s boredom. Following Ogilvy’s advice, it would appear that

¹⁰⁸ Mica Nava, “Framing Advertising: Cultural Analysis and the Incrimination of Visual Texts,” In Mica Nava et al., eds., *Buy This Book: Studies in Advertising and Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1997), 46.

¹⁰⁹ CEL 1, 162.

¹¹⁰ ELMW, 55.

¹¹¹ IM, 180. Lefebvre also states that advertising and the interrelated media of photography and cinema are responsible.

¹¹² David Ogilvy, *Ogilvy on Advertising* (Vintage, 1985), 149.

advertisements that present themselves to bored individuals are more likely to be considered than if they are interested in what they are doing. To Ogilvy, boredom is an ideal foundation for the successful reception of an advertisement's message. The emptiness felt by the viewers and their longing for content was a fertile soil for Ogilvy to plant the seeds of his advertising. Below I will build on this assertion by giving five examples of advertisements that have actively incorporated boredom or everydayness into their messages. Each example is taken from a different medium, each of which can be found throughout virtually anyone's everyday life, especially those in a highly urbanized and industrialized country such as the United States of America.

1) Catalogue: Furniture Store

For the first example, I will use an advertisement that appeared by chance¹¹³ in my own everyday life: the 2011 IKEA catalogue. The catalogue arrived in my mailbox one day in the fall of 2010, the cover unambiguously displaying its slogan for the upcoming year: 'Hooray for the Everyday'.¹¹⁴ With a multinational corporation embracing the everyday in such an overt and accepting manner, this slogan may at first glance appear to be at odds with a number of claims made throughout this dissertation of the everyday as being often neglected or overlooked. IKEA is not, however, embracing the everyday as an important area of inquiry. Is IKEA celebrating the repetitive and often overlooked everyday theorized by Lefebvre? To use a Lefebvrian answer: yes and no. On the one hand, given his relative obscurity in academia, let alone those outside of it, it is most likely that the advertising executives employed by IKEA for this campaign have

¹¹³ While it is not a matter of 'chance' that the catalogue arrived at my door, as the company fully intended to send it to my address, it is a matter of chance that I was the one who checked the mail that particular day, and it was also a matter of chance that I retained this catalogue instead of recycling it with the rest of the unsolicited mail I usually receive.

¹¹⁴ This is the American version of the catalogue.

probably never heard of Lefebvre. On the other hand, this is a celebration of furnishing one's everyday life akin to Lefebvre's utopian wish for a transformation of everyday life. That is, of course, until next year's IKEA catalogue arrives, which will undoubtedly celebrate the everyday (albeit with a different annual slogan), and which will reveal a much more current and vibrant everyday life to pursue.

IKEA's trademarked slogan – which is prominently displayed on the spine of the catalogue – is 'the life improvement store'. The catalogue's message, then, is one's everyday life will be interesting and exciting (hence the 'hooray') if one makes the necessary improvements at the 'life improvement store'. The suggestion is that this can be accomplished solely by purchasing the items inside the catalogue. Taken together, the 2011 catalogue theme, as well as the company's trademarked slogan, the following steps are implicitly suggested for its consumers. 1) Obtain the catalogue; 2) Simultaneously admire the prospective objects while acknowledging the banality of one's current everyday life; 3) Make the necessary purchases of the desired objects either in person or online; 4) Repeat the previous three steps the following year when the new catalogue materializes in one's mailbox. The desired effect is to create a cycle of steady consumerism where new consumers and returning customers both try to stay abreast of the latest trends in home furnishings, or, as IKEA would have it, 'life improvement'.

To illustrate the above cycle of consumerism with regards to IKEA, an additional example, one from popular culture, will aid the current discussion. A previous edition of the IKEA catalogue was featured in Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club*.¹¹⁵ The first

¹¹⁵ For an analysis of Palahniuk's work and boredom, see Lance Rubin's essay "The Politics of Boredom: Punk, the Situationist International and Chuck Palahniuk's *Rant*," In *Reading Chuck Palahniuk: American Monsters and Literary Mayhem*, eds. Cynthia Kun and Lance Rubin (London: Routledge, 2009), 129-142; for an analysis of Palahniuk's work and the concept of the 'culture industry' see the preceding essay in the

instance comes when the novel's nameless protagonist narrates the interesting relationship some of his associates developed with their IKEA catalogues: "The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue."¹¹⁶ For these people, a different type of imagery was being sought out. In his book on photography, Roland Barthes discusses a similar scenario, albeit without IKEA in mind. Barthes juxtaposes the pornographic image with the erotic image. To Barthes, "there is no *punctum* in the pornographic image; at most it amuses me (and even then, boredom quickly follows)."¹¹⁷ In Barthes' estimation, the emphasis on sexual organs is boring, whereas their concealment in erotic images is interesting. Pornographic images using women as objects were being replaced by the eroticism of actual objects. *Fight Club*'s nameless protagonist goes on to explain why people return again and again to the catalogue:

You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple of years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got your sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug.

Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you.¹¹⁸

The protagonist emphasizes the importance placed on these objects in one's life. While the 'nest' comforts, it also terrorizes. In a dialectical reversal, the consumer transitions from the role of owner of the objects to being owned by the objects. That is to say, one's life becomes dominated by the artificial need to surround oneself with artificial things such as new furniture. It is a vicious cycle, especially for those individuals such as the

same collection by David Simmons and Nicola Allen, "Reading Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* and *Haunted* as a Critique of 'The Culture Industry'," 116-128. In 1999 the book was adapted as a film of the same name directed by David Fincher. In the film, the IKEA catalogue is replaced (perhaps for copyright reasons) by a FURNI catalogue.

¹¹⁶ Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 43.

¹¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 59.

¹¹⁸ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 44.

protagonist who have little else in their lives. The extent of the narrator's isolation and boredom is expounded further in the novel: "I was tired and crazy and rushed, and every time I boarded a plane, I wanted the plane to crash. I envied people dying of cancer. I hated my life. I was tired and bored with my job and my furniture, and I couldn't see any way to change things."¹¹⁹ The narrator eventually gets to a breaking point where he completely rejects the prescribed lifestyle found in the IKEA catalogue.

2) *Magazine: Automobile*

The second example of advertisements comes from an advertisement in a magazine. Magazines appear throughout the everyday regardless of whether one has a subscription or not. A friend may have them on his or her coffee table, they could be in the waiting room at the doctor's or dentist's offices, or they may have been left by someone on the subway. Additionally, magazines can be purchased on a whim, or by design, on the streets at newspaper stands, in convenience stores, or even bookstores. Amongst the journalistic coverage and/or opinion pieces in most magazines are advertisements. Canada's *Maclean's* magazine is one such example. In the April 23rd, 2007 issue, *Maclean's* featured an advertisement on its 11th page. In this space the Chrysler car company featured an advertising campaign for its 2008 Dodge Avenger model with the slogan: "Boredom is the Villain."¹²⁰ It should be noted that this advertisement ran on both billboards and magazines. In the magazine ad, the foreground features the Avenger with a 'Brilliant Black Crystal Pearl' paint job parked at a 45 degree angle in a city street. The background features skyscrapers to the left and right of the image with a giant 'A' being projected into the night sky from a light source in the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 172.

¹²⁰ *Maclean's*, April 23, 2007, 11.

middle. The whole image is a riff on the popular superhero Batman. The desired message is fairly simple. 1) Boredom is the villain; 2) If you purchase this car you can be like batman; 3) When you own/drive this car you will be able to successfully combat boredom. Such a strategy involving boredom for selling vehicles is not new. It has been used in the past in the United States by Suzuki in the 1970s, who utilized the general slogan ‘Suzuki Conquers Boredom’, as an advertisement for all of their motorcycles. The image accompanying the text is a man riding a motorcycle at the side of the mountain. As I write this, there is an advertising campaign for John Deere’s Gator XUV 4x4 (an all-terrain utility vehicle) with the slogan ‘Gator vs. Boredom’.¹²¹ Much the same as Suzuki, this ad, too, shows a man riding the vehicle up a mountain. With these images/messages taken together, motorcycles, cars, and all-terrain vehicles, it is apparent that these vehicles have all been portrayed as remedies for boredom. The consistent message is that boredom needs to be combated, but despite this common thread there is also a contradiction. Each advertisement makes the claim that their vehicle is the one true remedy for boredom, but they remain silent on the similar messages conveyed by competitors, regardless of whether they, too, explicitly use boredom or not.

The Dodge Avenger’s advertisement message of ‘boredom is the villain’ is expanded in *Strada*, a consumer magazine produced by Chrysler for those who already own Chryslers. The spring 2007 issue of *Strada* featured an expanded version of the advertising campaign found in *Maclean’s* which elaborates on the Avenger’s slogan of ‘boredom is the villain’. They write: “In a segment of sameness, the all-new 2008 Dodge Avenger exceeds expectations, saving you from the sinister sameness of typical mid-size

¹²¹ I saw this advertisement outside of the men’s washroom on the third level of the RBC Center in Raleigh, North Carolina on January 1st, 2011.

sedans.”¹²² It is interesting to note the use of the term ‘sameness’ in this advertisement. As mentioned above, ‘sameness’ is an essential feature of the culture industry and it seems as though the culture industry is aware of this. Additionally, in *Strada* it is also said that the “Avenger leaves ordinary in the dust with brilliant technology, sleek style and race-inspired performance.”¹²³ Ordinary is here equated with boredom.¹²⁴ Through the use of this particular technology (automobile) the advertisement implies that one’s boredom can be remedied.

3) *Television: Deodorant*

In this example, two aspects of everyday life are blended together: television watching and deodorant use. People watch the television on a daily basis and use deodorant on a daily basis. This example is a television advertisement for deodorant from 2010. The featured commodity is called ‘Twist’ and is produced as part of the AXE body spray line of product. The commercial - thirty seconds in duration – for AXE Twist begins with a young male (who appears to be in his early twenties) in his bathroom spraying the deodorant on his bare chest before he embarks on a date. From here, scenes shift as often as the young man’s image who – in the process of courting a young woman of roughly the same age – is able to alter his appearance (attire, haircut, and facial hair) several times throughout their date. Throughout the commercial his date loses interest in him because of his sameness. After a period of a few seconds she becomes bored with him and turns her attention elsewhere, such as to her mobile phone. Whenever the

¹²² “Boredom is the Villain,” In *Strada* (Spring, 2007), 22.

¹²³ Ibid., 23.

¹²⁴ Other advertising campaigns have utilized the term ‘ordinary’ for their competition in order to sell their products. A 2010/2011 tag line on a bag of Friskies Grillers Blend cat food is: “Step outside the ordinary.” Since the slogan does not expand on this suggestion, it is unclear whether the owner or the cat or both will be afforded the opportunity to escape the ordinary by purchasing or eating this product.

female companion gazes back at him he is sporting a new look and he regains her interest. Why does he do this? Quite simply, so he is not boring. A narrator's voice appears in the final seconds of the advertisement stating that "women get bored easily." The narrator then concludes the commercial by proclaiming the product slogan: "the new AXE Twist: The Fragrance that Changes." Returning to a previous example from the movie 'Happiness', it would seem as though this could have been the solution to Allen's problem with being a bore and therefore unable to approach a woman for a date.

According to the explicit message in commercial, it seems as though the last thing a heterosexual male ought to do when on a date with a woman is to present a consistent image. Women are portrayed as 'easily' bored, which is reminiscent of how the suburban housewife was portrayed as having a superficial boredom that can be easily remedied and is unworthy of serious attention. The idea is to keep moving. If she gets bored, it is with the old you. By the time she realizes how boring you are, you have morphed into a newer, more interesting version. That is, of course, as long she only notices the attire, haircut, and facial hair. If she notices the same old heroic stories, tired pickup lines, and so forth, the body spray will not matter. Or will it? Does the spray mask body odour (as well as create it) along with masking one's personality (as well as create it)? Presumably, if one considers the logic of the advertisement, AXE Twist does not change either. The message seems to be, if you use AXE Twist, you will be a nomadic adventurer and unique in life, but only if you are a consumer of sameness. Buy the same product over and over again and you will be unique. Buy the same product as your friends and you will still be unique. Essentially, the contradiction in the advertisement is the suggestion to be the same as everyone else and you will at the very same time be unique. As a

result, women will be attracted to you because you will not be boring. This plays on the fear of consumers that they will be considered boring.

4) *Napkin: Restaurant Chain*

The fourth advertising example demonstrates the vast reach advertising has with everyday life. In the summer of 2009 I ventured into the Oxford, Ohio location of the restaurant chain Buffalo Wild Wings for dinner. This restaurant chain is of the bar and grill variety, specializing in boneless chicken wings. This particular restaurant franchise offers an assortment of cocktail napkins featuring various witty catchphrases and enticing messages. Underneath my beverage I found the following message on the napkin: “You’re here with all your pals because without them you’re boring.” On the bottom right corner of the napkin is the restaurant logo and the restaurant’s trademarked slogan, which reads: “You have to be here.” By combining the trademarked slogan with the message on the napkin, the following logical chain takes shape: 1) You have to be here; 2) When you are here, you ought to be accompanied by other people; 3) If you come alone, you will be considered boring. Since being boring is highly undesirable, and if this message is taken seriously, a stigma emerges where customers will not want to enter this establishment alone. In bringing friends to the restaurant, the customer benefits by not appearing boring and the restaurant benefits in the increased sales derived from additional consumers.

This is another example of an advertisement that employs boredom as a foil in order to promote and perpetuate the consumption of its product(s). The difference being that the distribution of napkins is directed solely at pre-existing customers, as opposed to advertisements that are directed at drawing in new customers, this advertisement is solely

directed at those who have already purchased the product(s). The napkin's message is to be applied to the next visit where, if it is followed, one's friends will be in tow.

5) *Billboard: Breakfast Cereal*

Finally, the last example of boredom and advertising comes from a billboard. Billboards occupy both a significant and insignificant part of everyday life. Especially for those who commute to work on a daily basis, dozens of billboards enter into one's field of vision along the way. Anywhere from the side of a highway or street, to the interior or exterior of a subway station, to the side of a bus bench/shelter (or the bus itself), billboard advertisements are prominent objects in what Lefebvre calls the 'social text.'¹²⁵ While the billboards in subway or bus stations are flexible if their patrons are waiting around, in general they need to be seen and understood in a very short period of time. For example, if a bus is driving by and an individual is stationary or if an individual is driving by a stationary billboard, both situations entail a limited opportunity for the advertisement to imbed itself in the psyche of a potential consumer.

I came across the billboard for the present example while I was walking on a sidewalk in Sudbury, Ontario. Beside a railway track was an advertisement for a new and improved version of Shreddies cereal. The advertisement was based on the reinvention/rebranding Shreddies undertook by introducing its new product, Diamond Shreddies. On the left of the billboard was the old version of the cereal in the shape of a square with the caption 'boring'. On the right side of the billboard was an image of the new version in the shape of a diamond with the caption 'exciting!' underneath. This is a concrete example of Lefebvre's dialectic of the 'new' and 'archaeo' mentioned in the first section of this chapter. The 'new' version of Shreddies is an example of an

¹²⁵ See CEL 2, 306-312.

advertising campaign making a slight alteration in order to create a new product. Its newness is solely predicated upon the consumer's inability to recognize the difference or taking the advertisement as an attempt at humour.

The advertisement for Shreddies – along with all of the other advertisements – is directed towards the masses. That is to say, all of the above advertisements are directed at the mass consumption by a mass of consumers. Almost all of these advertisements mask this fact of mass consumption and are instead directed towards an individual, authentic experience. However, advertisements are not alone in their use of boredom to sell their products. One of the most explicit examples of boring images for sale is Martin Parr's multi-volume collection of *Boring Postcards*.¹²⁶ Parr's collection is situated in the space between advertising and art. Postcards not only account for where one has been, but they also promote it, at least they used to. Parr's postcards are all decades old and represent a modernity that still persists, but what passes for advertising via postcard has largely changed. The postcards in Parr's collections are unaccompanied by explanation or contextual markers. The picture is all that is revealed and not the text on its verso (if such a text indeed exists on these particular postcards). What each individual card does not show are the processes of modernity in motion. As Lefebvre would say, "No camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms."¹²⁷ Indeed, these postcards merely document a dull moment frozen in time.¹²⁸ But were they dull at the time they were produced? Were they exciting and interesting when these scenes/settings were first

¹²⁶ There are currently three-volumes of boring postcards that feature the modernism/modernity of England, America, and Germany, respectively. See Martin Parr's *Boring Postcards* (London: Phaidon, 1999); *Boring Postcards USA* (London: Phaidon, 2000); *Langeweilige Postkarten* (London: Phaidon, 2001).

¹²⁷ RH, 36.

¹²⁸ Lefebvre has argued that the "time of daily life is not only represented in clocks and watches; it is also represented in photographs and curios-souvenirs." CEL 3, 133.

captured on film? If people did send these postcards, what did they write on them? Joe Moran offers an interesting explanation of what these images mean for boredom, everyday life, and modernity.

If we read these pictures as amusing kitsch, a reading which may account for the commercial success of these books, then we are only repeating the ahistoricism of capitalism's endless search for the new and improved. In fact, the boredom of these postcards exposes not only the recently fashionable but, by extension, the currently fashionable as well. If contemporary examples of the dismally humdrum, such as tower blocks and ringroads, were seen only recently as symbols of thrilling modernity, then today's thrillingly modern is the subject of tomorrow's boring postcard.¹²⁹

In the case of advertisements, any interest they conjure up will have a shelf life akin to the postcards in Parr's collection. They will be replaced by newer and more fashionable material. They could, however, become interesting again, as is evidenced by Parr's collection, or they could be permanently discarded. The culture industry is flexible in this way. If a critical perspective is to be retained, however, it must be remembered that this flexibility is all part of a process of commodification imparted by the culture industry.

Avant-Garde Image: Pop Art

The transition from the previous section to this section is apparent when one realizes that the leading figure of Pop art, Andy Warhol, worked in advertising before becoming a prominent artist. On the surface, the transition appears to be fairly fluid when one considers his most famous pieces. For example, the Campbell's soup can(s), Brillo boxes, and the silk screen prints of Marilyn Monroe are all pieces that feature products of the culture industry. At first glance it would seem as though Warhol was

¹²⁹ Moran, "Benjamin and Boredom," 177. For a reading that takes Parr's collection as essentially 'amusing kitsch', see Tom Vanderbilt, "This Bland is My Bland," *Interiors* 160(2), (February, 2001): 59-61.

merely parroting his previous career in the advertising business, producing artworks that have no greater aesthetic value than advertisements. Another way to view Warhol is as a critic of consumerism akin to Lefebvre and Adorno, but one who predominantly worked with canvases, sculptures, and films as opposed to texts and high theory. For this section, I will argue for the latter view while working through the tension of the former view. Furthermore, in order to distinguish the popular music mentioned in the second section of this chapter with Warhol's Pop art, I follow Jean Baudrillard's pronouncement in his book *The Consumer Society* that the proper reading of Warhol's art begins by acknowledging that "Pop art is not a popular art."¹³⁰ The key distinction between 'Pop' and 'popular' is on the production side as opposed to the consumer side. That is to say, even if Pop art is adored by a great deal of people, it is a commentary on that very popularity as opposed to popular music, which cannot comment on the popular as such.

As an artist, Warhol has been referred to as the "prince of boredom."¹³¹ Warhol is a world renowned/reviled artist whose avant-garde approach successfully combined boredom with art in what has come to be known as Pop art. Referring to Pop art as avant-garde may at first appear to be a contradiction, if one follows Clement Greenberg's distinction between 'avant-garde and kitsch' from his famous essay of the same name. These two broad categories for types of art are antithetical to one another in Greenberg's eyes. In fact, another name given to kitsch by Greenberg is 'rear-guard'.¹³² With this, it would seem impossible to be both at the front and the back of art. However, for this section I will predominantly focus on the work of one artist that straddles the line

¹³⁰ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 120.

¹³¹ See William Wilson's essay "Prince of Boredom: The Repetition and Passivities of Andy Warhol," In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 291-294.

¹³² Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 9.

between kitsch and avant-garde: Andy Warhol.¹³³ While I use the term ‘avant-garde’ for Warhol’s contribution of Pop art, affixing this label to him is not without its difficulties. It must be acknowledged that today Warhol has been at least partially, if not completely, absorbed into the culture industry and his catchphrase of “in the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes”¹³⁴ has become a well-known and often repeated phrase. Whatever meaning it once had is forgotten.¹³⁵

Before establishing the links with the avant-garde, it is important to first ask, how are Pop art and kitsch related? According to Jean Baudrillard, it is simple, “Pop is kitsch.”¹³⁶ Kitsch is the broader of the two categories in that all Pop art is kitsch, but not all kitsch is Pop art. Pop art may have evolved into Kitsch, but a reading of some of Warhol’s early pieces reveals Warhol’s technique of ‘mirroring’ society. Jean Baudrillard believes that “Warhol’s position [is] particularly interesting, when he holds up the mirror of a utopia based on sheer banality.”¹³⁷ How did Warhol make such banal items interesting? It began with an admiration of boring and often overlooked ‘things’. In fact, Warhol made the rare claim, especially for an American, that he liked boring things.

¹³³ I should clarify here regarding the application of the ‘avant-garde’ label to Andy Warhol and why it is problematic. For example, Jean Baudrillard has claimed that “Andy Warhol does not belong to any avant-garde.” *Conspiracy of Art: Manifestoes, Interviews, Essays*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and trans. Ames Hodges. (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), 44. This can be contrasted with Peter Bürger whose take on Warhol is that he is part of the “neo-avant-garde,” which Bürger defines as something that “stages for a second time the avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatever.” *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 61. From these two passages a triad emerges: kitsch - avant-garde - neo-avant-garde. Depending on one’s perspective, Warhol can be viewed as any one of these or perhaps even all three.

¹³⁴ Andy Warhol, *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, xxv.

¹³⁵ Lynn Spigel makes the point that “not only was pop art about commercial media, it was easily appropriated by the media.” Lynn Spigel, “Warhol TV: From Media Scandals to Everyday Boredom,” In *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 257.

¹³⁶ Baudrillard, *The Uncollected Baudrillard*, 144.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

I've been quoted a lot as saying, "I like boring things." Well, I said it and I meant it. That doesn't mean I'm not bored by them. Of course, what I think is boring must not be the same as what other people think is, since I could never stand to watch all the most popular action shows on TV, because they're essentially the same plots and the same shots and the same cuts over and over again. Apparently, most people enjoy watching the same basic thing, as long as the details are different. But I'm just the opposite: if I'm going to sit and watch the same thing I saw the night before, I don't want it to be essentially the same – I want it to be *exactly* the same. Because the more you look at the exact same thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel.¹³⁸

Warhol identifies the difference involved with the experience of boredom by asserting that what bores one person does not necessarily bore the next. Furthermore, Warhol's emphasis on tarrying with the exact same thing is reminiscent of John Cage's approach to music. The goal for Warhol was to feel completely empty instead of experiencing the half emptiness (half fullness) offered by television and related forms of entertainment. While this may appear to be a complete disconnect with one's environment, this emptiness is at the same time a deep connection with the modern world. That is, in order to grasp the boredom of modernity, Warhol distanced himself from what the interesting things of the culture industry and he was then afforded the appropriate distance with which he could critique it.

It is both difficult and easy to 'like boring things'. It is difficult to actively and consciously drift further into boredom, but it is easy to like things that induce boredom under the guise of it being interesting. It can, however, be difficult to assert one's boredom as an aesthetic judgement when the artwork in question is highly revered. "And the people," quips Clement Greenberg, "who in their boredom with this sort of thing pretend to themselves – they're saying a new era of art is opening up, big doors into the future, and so forth – these people who see this and don't confess to themselves that they

¹³⁸ Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1980), 64.

are bored are inauthentic too....”¹³⁹ This passage comes from Greenberg’s lectures titled *Homemade Esthetics*. Greenberg expands on this thought on the next page in the same text:

If you say, “I like being bored,” as Warhol has said, you’re not talking about real experience, you’re saying something that gets put in the category of surprising because it’s a contradiction in terms. It’s all very well to say these things, but the inauthenticity I talk about is to see people putting up with boredom for fear that they may be thought not to be “with it.”¹⁴⁰

Greenberg points to an important dilemma many art enthusiasts face when they are presented with art that could be classified, such as Warhol’s, as anti-art. Not accepting a banal artwork as a masterpiece when it is deemed as such may result in one not being ‘with it’, as Greenberg puts it. It is akin to the dilemma of the emperor who has no clothes. As opposed to posing as ‘bored’ in order to appear superior to one’s environment, this is posing as ‘interested’ in order to fit in. This is the dilemma Warhol’s art imparts on its spectators.

Warhol’s creations were not only on the canvas but also in the showroom. Warhol was not only striving to have his work viewed as an art object, but he was also holding up a mirror to spectators in order to say look at yourself and the society around you. This is what differentiates Warhol’s work from standard kitsch. In the aesthetic sphere, kitsch has little artistic value aside from serving as a distraction from everyday life. Warhol’s art may be received as a distraction from everyday life, but it is an explicit reflection of everyday life, unlike what is traditionally understood as kitsch. Clement Greenberg offers the following account for the emergence of kitsch:

¹³⁹ Clement Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics: Observations on Art and Taste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 135.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

The peasants who settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois learned to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but they did not win the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city's traditional culture. Losing, nevertheless, their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide.¹⁴¹

This is where Warhol's work blends with standard kitsch. It is seen as the very mass culture that it holds up a mirror to. This standard kitsch is a major component of the modern world, as Matei Calinescu argues in his book *The Five Faces of Modernity*, kitsch is one of the five faces of modernity.¹⁴²

The phenomenon of compulsive consumption, the fear of boredom, and the need for escape, combined with the widespread view of art as both play and display, are among the factors that in various degrees and fashions have contributed to the growth of what is called *kitsch*. Kitch is one of the most typical products of modernity.¹⁴³

Lefebvre, too, acknowledged kitsch as a product of modernity, but was utterly dismissive of its lack of message. In the third volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre writes: "Kitsch, an industrial product, becomes positively comforting – an art of happiness in security – whereas the art work, born out of anguish that has or has not been mastered, disturbs."¹⁴⁴

Here, again, the blurring between Warhol's work and standard kitsch is evident. While Pop art may make some happy like standard kitsch, its creative potential is its ability to disturb. This disturbing element is much more apparent in Warhol's piece 'Green Car Crash' where he painted a picture found in the magazine *Newsweek* of a car crash. It is

¹⁴¹ Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 10.

¹⁴² The others are modernism, postmodernism, decadence, and avant-garde.

¹⁴³ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 7.

¹⁴⁴ CEL 3, 96.

disturbing to know that the driver of the car in this image was killed in this accident.

While this is a much more apparent type of disturbance in Warhol's art, the same mirror held up to the car crash is being held up with his other works.

Warhol's success and acceptance by the culture industry makes it difficult to see him as a critic of society. It is for this reason that his art appears as kitsch. Adorno identifies one aspect of kitsch as "the dictatorship of profit over art."¹⁴⁵ Following Adorno, this would mean that all advertisements are kitsch since profit is the goal and art is not. Warhol's kitsch emphasizes such a dictatorship of profit, but one that, read in the context of a work of avant-garde art, reveals a penetrating critique of consumerism. It is important to note that Andy Warhol's studio was affectionately referred to as 'the factory'. This signals a link between Warhol's production of art with the assembly line. Industrialization and aesthetics are interwoven in Warhol's work, but it is an aesthetics of industrialization more than the industrialization of aesthetics.

Boring things were produced in Warhol's factory. The focus of Warhol's Pop art has been described as art that "reproduces mass reproduced reality."¹⁴⁶ It is not surprising, then, that Fredric Jameson elected to have Andy Warhol's painting 'Diamond Dust Shoes' on the cover of his book *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Warhol's work is ideally suited for a discussion of the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'. Jameson explains Warhol's work early on in this book.

Andy Warhol's work in fact turns centrally around commodification, and the great billboard images of the Coca-Cola bottle or the Campbell's soup can, which explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital, ought to be powerful and critical political statements. If they are not that, then one would surely want to know why, and one would want to begin to wonder a little

¹⁴⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 13.

¹⁴⁶ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 148.

more seriously about the possibilities of political or critical art in the postmodern period of late capital.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, David Harvey argues that it is worth highlighting,

[t]he mobilization of fashion, pop art, television and other forms of media image, and the variety of urban life styles that have become part and parcel of daily life under capitalism. Whatever else we do with the concept, we should not read postmodernism as some autonomous artistic current. Its rootedness in daily life is one of its most patently transparent features.¹⁴⁸

Despite Harvey's observation that "its rootedness" is "in daily life," Pop art is not a major concern of Lefebvre's in his project of a critique of everyday life. The art movement does, however, surface in his writings, albeit only briefly. In *Everyday Life in the Modern World* Lefebvre wrote disparagingly that with Pop art "aestheticism is added to the technicist trend."¹⁴⁹ While I do not want to argue that Lefebvre is wrong in his assessment, he nevertheless fails to see the commonalities between his project and Pop art. One way or another Pop art and everyday life share a strong bond. This is especially evident in the vast oeuvre of Warhol who, it is worth mentioning, worked with a variety of media.

In order to show the continuity of Lefebvre's work with Warhol's it is important to note that Lefebvre argued that the "critique of everyday life encompasses a critique of art by the everyday and a critique of the everyday by art."¹⁵⁰ In addition, Lefebvre argued "thus it is that the functions of the critique of everyday life can be determined by reference to an art which immerses itself in everyday life."¹⁵¹ I argue that Warhol's art is one that immersed itself in everyday life. As Andreas Huyssen has noted, there are

¹⁴⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 9.

¹⁴⁸ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 63.

¹⁴⁹ ELMW, 49. He also includes Op art in this comment. As for aestheticism and boredom, Lefebvre argues that "aestheticism is still no barrier against boredom." IM, 354.

¹⁵⁰ CEL 2, 19.

¹⁵¹ CEL 1, 24-25.

connections between not only Pop art and everyday life, but there are also connections between the critique at the heart of Pop art and its relationship to Lefebvre's critique of everyday life:

If Pop art has drawn our attention to the imagery of daily life, demanding that the separation of high and low art be eliminated, then today it is the task of the artist to break out of art's ivory tower and contribute to a change of everyday life. He would be following the precepts of Henri Lefebvre's *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (*Everyday Life in the Modern World*), no longer accepting the separation of the philosophical and the non-philosophical, the high and the low, the spiritual and the material, the theoretical and the practical, the cultivated and the non-cultivated; and not the planning only a change of the state, of political life, economic production and judicial and social structures, but also planning a change of everyday life. Aesthetics should not be forgotten in such attempts to change everyday life. The aesthetic activity of human beings not only manifests itself in the iconic arts but in all spheres of human activity.¹⁵²

To Huyssen, then, Warhol's work provides the opportunity to reflect on everyday life in the modern world. However, despite the window it opens into thinking critically about the quotidian fabric, it also provides the opportunity for its viewers to gloss over the contradictions at the heart of the daily. Whereas culture industry images provide distraction, but inevitably have a by-product of critical examination, Warhol's Pop Art offers the opposite. While critical reflection is arguably its intention, distraction is the by-product of Warhol's aesthetic.

Huyssen also argues that "pop seemed to liberate art from the monumental boredom of Informel and Abstract Expressionism."¹⁵³ With this, it seems as though the action painting of Jackson Pollock and his fellow Abstract Expressionists morphed from abstract expression to a concrete impression of boredom. Jean Baudrillard shares this sentiment with Pop art as he has declared that "[m]asterpieces bore us with their sacred

¹⁵² Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 157-158. To be consistent with the rest of this dissertation, in this quotation I have altered Huyssen's translation of Lefebvre's text as *Daily Life in the Modern World* to the published translation version of *Everyday Life in the Modern World*.

¹⁵³ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 142.

conformism.”¹⁵⁴ However, if one follows Herbert Read’s line of thought that “art redeems our actions from monotony and our minds from boredom,”¹⁵⁵ then masterpieces cannot be boring. Similarly, art historian Francis Colpitt once wrote that “[a]s far as I know, no artist, Warhol included, likes to be accused of making trivial or irrelevant works of art. Boredom negates the possibility of any enjoyment of, or interest in, a work of art.”¹⁵⁶ Here, then, are four theorists with four different takes on the function of serious art. For Huyssen, Pop art is a response to the boredom of its immediate predecessors. Similarly, for Baudrillard, the most serious of all artworks, such as the masterpieces of Abstract Expressionism, are boring because they conform to society. For Read, a serious artwork alleviates the boredom of lesser cultural works such as those found in everyday life. For Colpitt, Warhol’s art cannot be deliberately boring because artists do not want to be considered boring. But what if boredom is the goal of a serious artwork?

Matei Calinescu argues that Duchamp was “kitschified by Andy Warhol.”¹⁵⁷ For Calinescu, Duchamp is profound and Warhol is banal. The possibility of the banal being profound is lost on Calinescu in this assessment. Additionally, Calinescu claims that: “Kitsch appears as an easy way of ‘killing time’, as a pleasurable escape from the banality of both work and leisure. The fun of kitsch is just the other side of terrible and

¹⁵⁴ Baudrillard, *Cool Memories IV*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Herbert Read, *To Hell with Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), 175.

¹⁵⁶ Frances Colpitt, “The Issue of Boredom: Is it interesting?” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43(4), (Summer, 1985): 361. Colpitt’s insistence on the separation of art and boredom amongst artists can be contrasted with the art critic Brian O’Doherty who believes that boredom is not only a goal of artists, but he also differentiates between two types of boring art: high-boredom art and low-boredom art. He defines these as follows: “If high-boredom art depends for its effect on suddenly forcing attention and then exhausting it, low-boredom art doesn’t force attention and, in fact, is easily ignored outside the self-conscious context of the gallery situation.” Brian O’Doherty, “Boredom and the Amiable Android,” In *Object and Idea: An Art Critic’s Journal 1961-1967* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 233.

¹⁵⁷ Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 255.

incomprehensible boredom.”¹⁵⁸ To Calinescu, then, kitsch is only a diversion and not a critique of the modern world’s ever increasing propensity for commodification. But what if kitsch and boredom are combined? What if kitsch and boredom were one and the same? This, I argue, is what Warhol has done with his Pop art.

Baudrillard – a great admirer of Pop art in general and Warhol in particular – saw in Warhol’s work both a continuation of Duchamp’s legacy, as well as something new. Baudrillard believed that “Duchamp and Warhol were the two great instigators of radical liquidation.”¹⁵⁹ To Baudrillard, Warhol, like Duchamp before him, “introduced nothingness into the heart of the image.”¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, for Baudrillard, Warhol was a “founder of modernity” whose work is so influential and profound that it “freed us from aesthetics and art.”¹⁶¹ Warhol’s basic *modus operandi* can be described, as Baudrillard once put it, as a double movement of “collapsing of banality into art and art into banality.”¹⁶² Clement Greenberg similarly argues that Marcel Duchamp was the principal innovator, inspiration and catalyst for the fusion of banality and art.

And so Duchamp anticipated everything. All they do is recapitulate and run variations on themes he has set. And I find Conceptual Art fascinating because of its desperation – and intriguing. It’s as though Conceptual Art says, all right, we are going to turn around on you, we are not going to give you any surprises at all and there won’t be an expectation involved either. You are going to get boredom so undifferentiated as to constitute a surprise all in itself. This solid, monolithic, unadulterated, undifferentiated boredom will really stand you off and be our memorial.¹⁶³

Following Baudrillard and Greenberg, Warhol can be viewed as a variation of Duchamp. One difference can be seen in the misdirection involved in Duchamp’s most famous piece

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 248.

¹⁵⁹ Baudrillard, *Paroxysm*, 107-108.

¹⁶⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, 53.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁶² Ibid., 63.

¹⁶³ Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics*, 175-176.

from 1917: 'Fountain'. This readymade, found object is a urinal with two signifiers that do not match what is signified. The first is the title 'Fountain', which, in a way, can be viewed as the opposite of the urinal. The object and the signifier differ. Secondly, the piece has the name R. Mutt inscribed on it instead of Duchamp's name. In contrast with Duchamp, Warhol does not have the same misdirection at work in his pieces. The Campbell's soup can(s), for instance, is exactly what it says it is. What is misdirected with Warhol seems to be the mirror he is holding up to society. Interestingly, Duchamp himself once said that "You can't do a boring painting. Obviously it's been done, but it's easier in the semitheatrical realm."¹⁶⁴ As was shown above with the Fluxus group, boredom and the 'semitheatrical realm' can work, but it is not without its difficulties. As for the impossibility of doing a boring painting, Warhol accepted Duchamp's challenge and created not only boring paintings but other boring things. He defied Duchamp all the while following in Duchamp's footsteps.

Part of Warhol's mystique involved his admiration for two main features of contemporary society: machines and boring things. In an interview on Warhol, Jean Baudrillard remarked: "What separates us from Andy Warhol, for instance, is that he was lucky enough to be a machine. And we are not."¹⁶⁵ This resemblance to a machine is apparent when Warhol spoke. In some of Warhol's interviews from 1962, for instance, Warhol replicates the tendency of most machinery to remain passive until activated when he only wanted to answer in binary with yes or no answers.¹⁶⁶ This was part of his mystique, his aura. Baudrillard summarizes Warhol's mystique in the following expansive passage from his book *The Perfect Crime*:

¹⁶⁴ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (De Capo Press, 1987), 99.

¹⁶⁵ Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, 236.

¹⁶⁶ Andy Warhol, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, 3-5.

So far as fame is concerned, Warhol's position is very simple. Fame is based on boredom, just as the aura of images is founded on their insignificance. In his *Journal*, the meticulous management of his fame is accompanied by a remarkable indifference to his own life. Fame is the accidental spotlight that lights up the involuntary actor of his own life. It is the aura of an existence conceived as an exceptional *fait divers*, rendered exceptional by artificial light. Everything is in the lighting. The natural light of genius is rare, but the artificial light which reigns over our world is so plentiful that there will inevitably be enough for everyone. Even a machine can become famous, and Warhol never aspired to anything but this machinic celebrity, a celebrity without consequence which leaves no trace. A celebrity which comes from the demand of everything today to be approved and fêted by the gaze. It is said that he was self-advertising. Not so: he was merely the medium for that gigantic advertising operation the world carries out through technology and images, forcing our imaginations to face, our passions to turn outwards, shattering the mirror we held up to it (hypocritically, as it happens) to tap it for our profit.¹⁶⁷

According to Susan Sontag, Warhol's aesthetic sensibility "defines itself in relation to the twin poles of boringness and freakishness."¹⁶⁸ This is reminiscent of Lefebvre's view of a 'double dimension' in the everyday mentioned in the second chapter where both banality and drama make up the fabric of everyday life.

It is hoped that it is now apparent that Warhol's work is concerned with the everyday in a similar manner to Lefebvre, albeit coming from a different (artistic) angle. Along with his visual artwork, his book of philosophy contains a wealth of interpretations on the mundane.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, one of his forays into literature (*a: a Novel*) is organized with twenty-four chapters, one for each hour in a day. Perhaps it can be referred to as a Pop art version of Joyce's *Ulysses*, as this work of 'fiction' depicts a day in the life of one of Warhol's real life associates, known as Ondine. There is even an exchange between Ondine (O) and another 'character' named Drella (D) where Ondine

¹⁶⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, 85-86. The journal that Baudrillard is referring to here is most likely *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, ed. Pat Hackett (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1989).

¹⁶⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), 44.

¹⁶⁹ See Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, (Orlando: Harcourt, 1975).

asks “What means boredom in French?” to which Drella replies “Ondine.”¹⁷⁰ While this book is generally considered to be a novel, it was based on, if not totally adapted from, audiotapes that recorded Ondine’s day. It, therefore, blurs the distinction between fiction and the realities of everyday life.

Similar to his literary work, Warhol’s films stretched the boundaries of its medium and its viewers’ attention spans. In a guidebook on DVDs, the synopsis of Warhol’s 35 minute short film *Blowjob* is as follows: “A visually static series of close-ups of a young man’s facial expressions as he experiences the titular act, this is as much about boredom as it is about sex.”¹⁷¹ It is as if Warhol was striving to echo Michel Foucault, who once said in an interview that “sex is boring.”¹⁷² The boringness of Warhol’s films seems to be intentional. As one commentator notes, “an eight-hour “underground” movie by Andy Warhol is boring, but his friends are delighted to understand that Warhol meant it to bore.”¹⁷³ If this is so, then it would appear that Warhol intended his audience to be bored as opposed to interested. However, it is much more complicated than that. Warhol wanted people to be interested in this boredom. That is, to acknowledge their boredom, the boredom that is widespread and is a hallmark of modernity.

¹⁷⁰ Andy Warhol, *a: a novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 310.

¹⁷¹ Paul Simpson, *Movie Lists: 397 Ways to Pick a DVD* (London: Profile Books, 2008), 28.

¹⁷² While this may be puzzling to those who know that Foucault wrote three volumes on the history of sexuality, it makes sense if sex is separated from sexuality. For context, the full passage is: “I must confess that I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that rather than sex ... sex is boring.” Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 229. Interestingly, Slavoj Žižek has written that “for a true philosopher, there are more interesting things in the world than sex.” Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 13.

¹⁷³ Thomas B. Hess, “J’Accuse Marcel Duchamp,” in *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, ed. Joseph Masheck (Cambridge, MA Da Capo Press, 2002), 118. One so-called ‘underground’ film of Warhol’s has been deemed, without irony, somewhat of a national treasure. Warhol’s film ‘Empire’ was added to the Library of Congress National Film Registry in 2004. It is 8 hours and 5 minutes of silent, black and white footage of the Empire State Building. This is one example of Warhol’s acceptance into the mainstream.

Taking something boring to be something interesting is a difficult perspective to accept. It is a contradiction that is difficult to reconcile. As for art, the lectures Clement Greenberg delivered at Bennington College in 1971 offer immense insight into the complex fusion of boredom and art more generally. Consider the three following passages from those lectures.

Boredom is one of the flattest, most self-evident, most self-justifying of all esthetic judgments. There is no appeal from boredom. Even when you tell yourself you like boredom, there the verdict is. And with this funky art – and I have through the list of labels before; Earth Art, Environmental Art, and so forth – boredom gets into all these things. And it is as if when these items of art collapse – and it is a mixed figure of speech – they don't collapse under the weight of boredom, they collapse under their own weight.¹⁷⁴

Hence, the boringness of the kind of art that, as so much far-out art does today, sets things hitherto considered non-art in a situation or context or setting in which they have to be approached as art and nothing else. This is the boringness of art by fiat. It is true that anything we choose to call art is art, but that doesn't make it good art. And boredom, as I've said several times before, the boringness of this constitutes an esthetic judgment – and you don't escape from the difference between good and bad.¹⁷⁵

Now there are art lovers who'll express a positive "esthetic" judgment precisely because they are at a loss for any judgment at all. Or still worse: They may be really and truly bored because the art at hand is really and truly boring; they may be having a valid esthetic reaction, even if a negative one, but they'll deny it and express a positive judgment because they've gotten used to associating boringness with "advancedness" and "advancedness" with quality. Of course it's not easy to register the difference between puzzlement and boredom. But in that lies the challenge of "advanced-advanced" art, literature, music in this time.¹⁷⁶

Though not specifically referring to Warhol, Greenberg's comments are applicable to Warhol in particular and Pop art in general. For Greenberg, it is important to distinguish between bad art and boring art much the same as Adorno distinguished between popular music and serious music. Greenberg believes that "Bad, inferior art is not necessarily

¹⁷⁴ Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics*, 173-174.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

boring or vacuous. What is relatively new about the badness of recent ‘advanced’ art – new, that is, in the context of formal art – is that it *is* so boring and vacuous.”¹⁷⁷ Bad art in this case refers to pieces that exhibit technical inferiority. What is missing in Greenberg’s articulation of good, bad, and boring art is the emphasis on social critique, especially in Warhol’s work.

As stated above, Andy Warhol’s work holds up a mirror to society. I do not here use the past tense since Warhol’s work lives on. His art is anti-art; his style highlighted society’s absence of style. Where the culture industry actively promotes the ideology of style as something eminently desirable and attainable, Warhol’s Pop Art offers the opportunity to reflect on society via a reflection of society. Seen in this light, Warhol’s Pop art is a variation of Goodstein’s claim of a ‘democratization of skepticism’. In addition to skepticism, it is the ‘democratization of aesthetics’. They are interrelated and both reveal and conceal the boredom of modernity. In Warhol’s case, everything is art, so nothing is art. In a way, Warhol’s work is a nail in the coffin of art. On the surface, Warhol’s position seems to be the opposite of Lefebvre’s. Instead of everyday life becoming a work of art, a work of art became everyday life. Both, however, saw an end to art from both inside and outside of it. Lefebvre makes this point clear at the end of *Introduction to Modernity* when he argues that “if life is to become the art of living, art must die and be reborn in life.”¹⁷⁸ A few pages earlier in the same text, Lefebvre quickly shifts from claiming “I do believe that art will die” to “I will go so far as to state that art is already dead.”¹⁷⁹ For Lefebvre, what passes for art has already been recuperated by the culture industry. This is why Warhol’s work has the appearance of kitsch. The only way

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷⁸ IM, 355.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 349.

to revive art, then, for Lefebvre is through everyday life and, at the same time, the only way to revive everyday life is through art, by making everyday life a work of art. This would result in an authentic style of life and the subsequent withering away of boredom as opposed to what Adorno called the culture industry's 'withering away of imagination'. Similarly, Lefebvre has written that "[t]hrough a lack of imagination derived from a lack of (dialectical) reason, most people (among the 'masses' themselves) do not think that things can ever really change."¹⁸⁰ The withering away of imagination is never complete. The culture industry decimates the imagination by instilling the need for distraction, but it necessarily leaves a space for the imagination to flourish. In this space one finds a utopian longing for content. If filled by the very sameness that created the absence, it is merely a matter of filling one type of emptiness with another kind of emptiness.

¹⁸⁰ CEL 1, 246.

Openings and Conclusions: Boredom as Critique of Everyday Life

[W]hat are the implications of a boredom so deeply seated
that we drift off in our own fantasies?¹ – Rob Shields

We might wish we could shake ourselves free of boredom,
or turn on happiness like a tap; but we cannot.² – Harvie Ferguson

So perhaps boredom is merely the mourning of everyday life?³ – Adam Phillips

* * * * * *

At the beginning of the last chapter from volume one of the *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre asks a question that is fundamental to his overall project: “When the world the sun shines on is always new, how could everyday life be forever unchangeable, unchangeable in its boredom, its greyness, its repetition of the same actions?”⁴ For Lefebvre, this is a rhetorical question, but one that requires asking for understanding the industrialized and urbanized world of modernity. While there is no concrete, definitive answer given, Lefebvre is speaking of a general orientation to his work and what he saw in modern society. So what was Lefebvre getting at with this question? The title of the chapter from which this passage is derived – ‘What is Possible’ – is an important clue. Lefebvre’s point in asking this is to emphasize that everyday life is indeed changeable. Everyday life in its current manifestation(s), while seemingly unchangeable, is ultimately an open project.⁵ Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life creates an awareness of this openness.

¹ Shields, *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle*, 66-67.

² Ferguson, *Self-Identity and Everyday Life*, 179.

³ Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 71.

⁴ CEL 1, 228.

⁵ For this reason, I have opted to give this concluding chapter the same title as Lefebvre gives his concluding chapter of his book *The Production of Space*: openings and conclusions See PS, 401-423.

What is Possible

While the critique of everyday life is a largely negative pursuit, Lefebvre always offered possible solutions to the problems he saw in society. He was a thinker of the possible, if not an eternal optimist. Prescriptive solutions are almost always offered, and they are almost always located at the end, or near the end of his texts. Whether it be a call for the creation of ‘moments’,⁶ ‘differential space’,⁷ a ‘new romanticism’,⁸ a ‘permanent revolution’,⁹ or ‘self-management’,¹⁰ Lefebvre was always trying to offer the theoretical tools for practical action. Taken together, these terms share the same general sentiment, same general argument, same general orientation, which roughly translates to a revolution of everyday life. With this, there would be new spaces, new social relations, different modes of production, different uses of technology, etc. Essentially, everything would have to change. When Lefebvre considers ‘what is possible’, he is speaking of a new society that transcends both capitalism and communism, as well as all other hitherto existing types of societies. Despite this enthusiasm for the possible, there is a gap between what *is* and *what is possible*. For example, how one gets from the abstract space of capitalism to the differential space of this new society is not exactly clear, and the same applies for the other prescriptions. However, if these gaps can be bridged, it is at that point when everyday life will be a work of art, and this is the everyday life that, according to Lefebvre, would not be filled with boredom. Throughout Lefebvre’s lifelong project of formulating a critique of everyday life, he was always aware of what he believed to be a pervasive boredom clouding modernity. For him, to understand the

⁶ See CEL 2, 340-358.

⁷ See PS, 52; 352-400.

⁸ See IM, 239-388.

⁹ See ELMW, 194-206.

¹⁰ See SC, 120-124.

modern world is to understand both its interesting elements and its boring elements. As most scholars studied the interesting, Lefebvre set out to study the boring. One of his key insights, left nascent in his writings, is that boredom and interest are dialectically intertwined. Boredom is a recurring theme in Lefebvre's project, yet one which is fragmented and spread across numerous texts. While Lefebvre failed to realize his proposed 'sociology of boredom' as part of his critique of everyday life, I have attempted to contribute towards such a study with my analysis of boredom. I have argued that Lefebvre's project is a key for unlocking a door to the phenomenon of boredom, but it is one that on its own is too small to properly fit in the lock. As Adorno would say, the key goes in, but it is not enough to open the door. Lefebvre's work, then, served as a point of departure for integrating the reflections on boredom put forth by a variety of other thinkers. This could, in a way, be referred to as a collaborative effort, albeit one where the collaborators are unaware of their collaboration. This is an essential feature of the interdisciplinarity of this dissertation. To understand boredom in modernity it was necessary to look at some of modernity's key features. Lefebvre's concept of the 'double process' of industrialization and urbanization is one such example. This concept helps establish the internal dialectic of mass culture, as these two intertwined forces of modernity foster growth and development with the proliferation of mass culture, all the while leaving an absence of style in everyday life. For the double process of industrialization and urbanization, I have frequently referred to the factory as the archetypal symbol of industry and the street as the archetypal symbol of the urban. The intertwining of these two processes is evident with a consideration of railways and/or highways. Railways, as mentioned in the first chapter, extend both the urban fabric and

industry and modernity itself. By looking at what extends modernity, one can begin to see the contours of the boredom it fosters throughout society.

Another ‘double process’ implicit in this study is production and consumption. They translate to the factory and the street. One produces in the factory, one consumes on the street. However, it is not quite as simple as that. There is a dialectical relationship between them. As well, these two elements share a connection with boredom and interest. As was mentioned in the fifth chapter, consumption, boredom, and interest are interconnected and form a conceptual triad. The dialectic of boredom and interest, or boring and interesting, is a persistent thread, perhaps *the* persistent thread. To see boredom lurking in the interesting is just as important as looking at the monotonous aspects of everyday life. However, the interesting and the boring are dialectically related. This dialect is at the heart of what Lefebvre calls the ‘absence of style in everyday life’. At the end of the first chapter I highlighted Lefebvre’s insight of the dialectic of boredom. Boredom and interest, or boring and interesting, are intertwined in modernity. Although everyday life in the modern world has the appearance of being fixed so that this process will continue, it is only within the everyday life that something else can be established. The appropriate Lefebvrian triad here, then, is boredom-interest-work. This can be read in at least two ways. The first is a continuation of the same and the second is a creative breakout. The key distinction being made here involves the term ‘work’. It will either be within the context of industrialized, rationalized, urbanized, secularized everyday life, or it will be an original and non-repeatable everyday life akin to what Lefebvre calls a ‘work of art’. The third term, often employed by Lefebvre, is a

methodological tool that articulates this type of bimodal movement between contradictions.

Lefebvorean Triads

Two opposing terms can often be mediated by a third. In Lefebvre's view, three conflictual terms can also be expressed as two conflictual terms and vice versa, depending on one's perspective. Throughout this dissertation I have employed what I refer to as Lefebvorean triads, modeled after Lefebvre's own approach. These triads are a way of demonstrating the dialectical relationship amongst three interrelated concepts, or 'conflictual moments'. It would be instructive to recapitulate a few of the triads here, as well as discuss their linkages.

1) Boredom-Interest-Utopia

This triad, I argue, is implicit in Lefebvre's latent theory of boredom. In his book *Introduction to Modernity*, he clearly identifies the dialectical relationship between boredom and interest, as discussed above, and while it is hinted at, he did not explicitly state the third term: utopia. By adding this third term, the dialectical movement of boredom and interest is much more evident. The utopian longing for content that is felt when one is bored often results in the seeking of something interesting. This seeking is often accomplished through the consumption of interesting things. When these interesting things no longer interest, one becomes bored and, again, has a utopian longing for something else interesting, something newer, something that has been produced much more recently. The dialectical spiral repeats as time goes on. This is an abstract model for what Lefebvre argues is a 'concealed movement' of modernity.

2) *Boredom-Modernity-Everyday Life*

A much more concrete application of this model occurs when the historical dimension of modernity is considered. In Lefebvre's work, modernity is an historical era, and everyday life is the verso of this era. If modernity is the era of perpetual newness (interest), everyday life is generally associated with perpetual sameness (boredom). Nevertheless, everyday life is the testing ground for the happiness promised by modernity. When the promised happiness is not achieved, boredom often sets in, along with a longing for content, or something new, something interesting. This is not to say that boredom is the only response to this disappointment, but, in a Lefebvrian theoretical framework, it is a predominant one.

3) *Mass Culture-Style-Absence of Style*

As stated in the introduction, Lefebvre identifies an internal dialectic of mass culture as the key component for understanding boredom in modernity. The above two triads are its abstract version and its historical version. Another dimension can be added to Lefebvre's theoretical framework when one considers the dialectical relationship between mass culture and style. Whereas, according to Lefebvre, there was a time before modernity where authentic style reigned, with the advent of mass culture everything changed. Style was replaced by mass culture, despite being referred to as style. With mass culture came, what Lefebvre calls, the absence of style in everyday life. This is his basic definition of boredom. A void persists in the everyday life of the modern world. It occasionally gets filled, but, more often than not, becomes empty again. Part of the reason why this absence of style is so pervasive is that it is part of the fabric of everyday

life and, therefore, applies to the spatial arrangements of streets, buildings, cities, suburbs, etc.

4) *Space-Time-Boredom*

Mass culture, then, also applies to the spatial configurations of modernity. This is somewhat unique, as boredom is most often associated with the passage of time, and rightly so. However, from a Lefebvrian perspective, the spatial must also be considered. Space and time are dialectically intertwined for Lefebvre, and if one wants to get to the heart of the rhythms of modern life, one must theorize the spatial, specifically the contradictions of space. If one wishes to understand boredom in modernity, then, one must look at its spatial makeup, which more often than not begins in a central location, such as a city, or urban area, and spreads from there in the urban fabric. For this reason, I first discussed urbanism in chapter three and the suburbs in chapter four. Here, the contradictions of space become apparent. Whereas a space promises a new type of lifestyle or experience, the experience of boredom arises and negates this promise.

5) *Homogeneity-Fragmentation-Hierarchization*

One particular contradiction of space noted in this dissertation is the unity between three conflictual moments that Lefebvre believes constitute the core elements of the space(s) of modernity: the homogenous, the fragmentary, and the hierarchical. Suburban housing tracts are prime examples of virtually identical houses (homogeneity), its occupants talk in monologues (fragmentation), and, in many cases, there is a class hierarchy where everyone is trying to keep up with the proverbial Joneses. This is a certain style of life (or absence of style) that is prevalent in the suburbs, but it is, admittedly, not shared by everyone. What is the significance of this? By utilizing a

Lefebvorean framework, a study of boredom is dialectical. Boredom is virtually everywhere, but it is given serious consideration virtually nowhere. If it appears as though I have argued for its omnipresence, this is not quite true. It is both everywhere and nowhere in modernity. Boredom can appear anywhere from the world-renowned urban centre of Paris, or even in the steadily expanding peripheries that are the sprawling American suburbs. It is both present and absent in these spaces. It is an historically specific mood linked to the rhythms of modernity. By looking closely at what Lefebvre calls the 'black sun of boredom' it is apparent that boredom is not only part of a constellation of experiences in modernity, but boredom itself is a constellation of various facets of everyday life in modernity. By assembling some of the fragments that constitute boredom as a constellation, the internal dialectic of mass culture begins to take shape. Depending on one's perspective, boredom can either be a monolithic entity or it can appear as composed of many elements.

Lefebvre's use of 'screen' as a metaphor for everyday life is equally appropriate for boredom. In everyday life, boredom is both concealed and revealed. In turn, the experience of boredom both reveals and conceals everyday life. Boredom is a window into the alienating effects of everyday life whether one experiences this boredom first hand or one examines texts on this subject. Boredom in this sense is a utopian wish for something else. For Lefebvre, this wish is for a style of life. Modernity both prevents this style of life while endlessly promising it. Something interesting always seems to be waiting when boredom arises. Advertisements and the commodities they advertise are temporary placeholders for this something else, an unknown 'x'. The mass culture that proliferates with the urban fabric generally offers the promise of a negation of boredom

without understanding it. Conversely, certain avant-garde artists take boredom as a problem of modern life that must be confronted. Both in the actual artistic piece(s) as well as the artistic process(es), certain avant-garde artists (Cage, Warhol) consciously employ boredom in their artistic ventures. Further to this, according to Lefebvre and mentioned in the second chapter, James Joyce had no choice with his monumental *Ulysses* but to make it profoundly boring. If it were to succeed as a novel of a day in the life, it had to be boring. It is both the flight from boredom promised by the culture industry and the confrontation of boredom provided by artists that the dialectic of boredom and interest becomes apparent.

It has been argued that whereas modernity continuously promises newer, more exciting things, it concurrently fosters the experience of boredom. This position can be opposed to the ordinary conception of boredom in several ways. First, boredom is common but it is not commonly understood. It is a widespread phenomenon, but it is highly complex. Second, while it is usually perceived as a superficial emotion that can be easily remedied, the remedies also foster the boredom they claim to prevent. Third, the locus of boredom in the ordinary conception is predominantly ascribed to the psychology of the bored individual as opposed to being a (by)product of modern society. Fourth, boredom is usually perceived as ahistorical and the afflicted are either just as bored as they have always been throughout time, or, because of the prevalence of amusements, the boredom of today is less than it would have been in the past. That is, as opposed to boredom being historically unique to modernity. Fifth, while boredom is primarily associated with time for most, the neglected category of space is here viewed as

equally important for understanding the contemporary prevalence of boredom. It is with the unique rhythms of the time-space of modernity where boredom becomes possible.

Although Roland Barthes anointed the 19th century as the century of boredom, this experience has gradually become further entrenched into everyday life throughout the 20th century and even the 21st century. Lefebvre's theoretical framework has made it possible to unravel some of the mysterious links between boredom and these time periods. In order to bring the discussion of boredom into the twentieth century it was necessary to examine the United States of America. Here, the fear of boredom is heightened through the seemingly perpetual striving for a better way of life, or, as it is better known, the pursuit of the American Dream. While Lefebvre argued that new towns are everyday life in its chemically pure state, I would add that the American Dream offered by its suburbs is fairly close company. By examining these two phenomena, the contradictions of space become apparent as a key component to the boredom of everyday life. While there are dialogues in the new town dwellers and there are monologues of suburban housewives, both share the common thread of an urbanism based on functionalism. This common thread runs through both of these spaces. Lefebvre takes the signals of these spaces to be what establishes the background of boredom in everyday life as well as opens a space for spontaneity and an awareness that change is a possibility. A simple question asked by suburban housewives – 'Is this all?' – discovered by Betty Friedan articulates the profundity of the boredom felt in these spaces.

While I have integrated Lefebvre and boredom in this dissertation, I have by no means exhausted the material of either of them. It is worth noting that Lefebvre and boredom parallel one another with regards to interest from academics, as both Lefebvre

and boredom have received the bulk of their attention in the last few decades. It is hoped that both continue to receive serious consideration in the future, although there are presently a few stumbling blocks. For example, Lefebvre's body of work is so diverse and expansive that it would be difficult to say what ought to be investigated further since there is so much to investigate. A number of his books are out of print and the majority of them have not been translated into English. In order for Lefebvre's work to continue its dissemination in the English speaking academy, new translations are required, along with new interpretations. On the theme of boredom, there are several threads that were discussed throughout the preceding pages within the context of Lefebvre's work, but there are a few that deserve to be highlighted as in need of much more attention than they have been given here.

Descartes

Especially with regards to city planning and architecture, I have made several mentions of Cartesianism. Now a household name, Descartes has left an indelible impression on the modern world either directly or indirectly. Several of modernity's influential figures have utilized their own unique variant of Cartesianism as the bedrock of their works. Additionally, these works have been linked to the experience of boredom. Haussmann's Paris, with its vast boulevards that reflect the straight lines of a Cartesian plane, is exemplary here. Le Corbusier's Cartesian Skyscraper is another instance of the Cartesian plane as a guide for a project, among many others. Descartes, of course, is not to be solely blamed or praised for the work of his followers or the mass profusion of boredom in modernity. Are the seeds of boredom sown with Cartesianism? Do Cartesian designers produce boring spaces? Does the philosophical separation of mind

and body in Descartes' work influence the experience of boredom? It would be worthwhile to examine Descartes' influence in greater detail. An in-depth study of both Descartes' philosophical and scientific works would be a valuable contribution to the study of boredom.

Taylorism

Much like Descartes, the work of Frederick Taylor has been highly influential in shaping modernity. While I have noted Descartes' influence on the producers of space, Taylorism is much more geared towards the regulators of time, such as those in the factory. I have attempted to argue that Taylorism is not only in the factory, but can also be found in the streets, shopping malls, at home, etc. Its links to boredom as well as the widespread tendency to strive for efficiency above all else has yet to be fully mapped out. With regards to efficiency, the straight lines of a Cartesian plane resemble the general orientation of Taylorism. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line and the greatest efficiency is usually considered to be achieved by following a straight line. What does such an ideological drive for maximum efficiency entail for the experience of boredom in modernity? Where else is Taylorism in society? Does it go by another name? Whether one refers to it as Taylorism or not, efficiency is nevertheless a widespread goal of present-day society.

What could be called its postmodern heir, the concept of McDonaldization put forth by George Ritzer, is an interesting point of departure for any considerations of the contemporaneity of Taylorism and boredom. The efficiency found in this fast food model is both continuous and discontinuous with Taylor's project. Whereas Taylor could have only dreamed of the implications of such a fast food model, its self-serve efficiency

meshes well with his prescription for all of daily life to strive for efficiency. It is also through a new consideration of Taylorism where one can see the ruptures between the modernity of Taylor's time and today. What does this mean for everyday life? How does the efficiency of today impact the experience of boredom? Can one still speak of boredom as an historically specific experience unique to modernity, or is there a new era?

Postmodern/Postmodernism/Postmodernity

I have limited my discussion of the postmodern to occasional remarks in order to remain consistent with Lefebvre's project. There are, however, many so-called 'postmodern' figures present in this dissertation, such as Jean Baudrillard in theory, Robert Venturi in architecture, Andy Warhol in art, John Cage in music, etc. While the 'postmodern' label does not hang neatly on any or all of these intellectual figures, they all, in some fashion or another, have been referred to as such. It can be said that the high modernism of literature (Flaubert and Joyce) and city planning and architecture (Le Corbusier and Haussmann) have complicated relationships with boredom. Following this, are there postmodern equivalents to these works? If so, how do they grapple with the experience of boredom? While the above 'postmodern' figures have all grappled with boredom in one way or another, a serious book-length study has yet to be completed that takes the 'postmodern' as its focal point.

Regardless of whether one accepts the concept of the postmodern, several aspects of what could be called 'postmodern' life are worth future consideration. In particular, so-called postmodern technologies, such as computers, smart phones, and tablets are becoming more and more entrenched in everyday life. If technocentrism truly is linked to the spread of boredom, such as Lars Svendsen argues, it would follow that as digital

technologies advance, so too will the experience of boredom long into the future. The final word on boredom and its history has not yet been written.

It is hoped that a new perspective on boredom has been achieved here. In viewing boredom as an experience that has a history, its complexity as a phenomenon begins to take shape. Also, more generally, it is hoped that those things widely deemed to be 'ordinary' and unworthy of attention deserve a second look. After all, as Lefebvre would argue, the 'familiar is not necessarily the known' and there is no reason for the study of the banal to itself be banal. In following this, what I have attempted in the preceding pages is an analysis of the problematic of boredom from a theoretical framework that takes everyday life as its point of departure. Specifically, this dissertation has been an integration of the critique of everyday life initiated by Henri Lefebvre and the historically specific experience of boredom initiated by modernity. It is an integration of the puzzle of Lefebvre with the riddle of boredom. I hope to have contributed to a broader understanding of both the puzzle and the riddle, but the main focus here was on the riddle of boredom through the theoretical framework of Lefebvre.

Finally, what makes boredom such an intriguing topic of inquiry is its familiarity to so many individuals on the one hand and its inattention by these very same individuals on the other. A great many people experience it on a daily basis throughout the globe, yet virtually no one takes it to be a serious phenomenon for investigation. The mass culture of modernity both enables such a consideration and attempts to prevent it. Boredom is, nevertheless, a window onto the modern world, specifically as a critique of that world. One simply has to recognize it as such. Perhaps what Lefebvre calls the 'black sun of boredom' will never set. Boredom persists because the everyday persists.

Perhaps Lefebvre's utopian wish for everyday life to become a work of art is a pipedream. Perhaps the riddle of boredom will never be solved. Boredom will, nevertheless, remain a window to the world and will continue to carry with it the potential of breathing new life into the project of a critique of everyday life. Whether or not it is acknowledged as such, from a Lefebvrian perspective, the basic definition of boredom is that it is a critique of everyday life.

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